

# Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty

by JJ Corley

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Summary: The year: 2015. The world is shaped by fear and death. Over half the human population has died amidst the chaos of the next age. Ikari Shinji is trained under Saotome Ranma, arriving in Tokyo3 only to find it under siege by the Angel Sachiel.

## 1. Honor's Duty Stanza One

\*\*\*\*

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<br>Gainax. This particular plot deviation was constructed by me,  
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<br>Alternate Universe or AU shall serve as my disclaimer for any  
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<br>few bucks and an old 486DX with a copy of edit.com. What A  
Prize. I've  
>made my point.<br> \*\*\*\*  
><br>Ludicrous Configuration! Productions  
> Presents<br>A Neon Genesis Evangelion Alternate Universe  
> By JJ Corley<br>  
> Evangelion: Honor's Duty<br>  
> 'I've only had one cherished dream.. and even then it's  
not  
<br>truly mine. I share it with my adoptive father..  
><br> 'I don't aspire to any particular career or profession in the  
  
>future...<br>  
> 'And so far, in the sixteen years of my life, things  
have  
<br>happened as fate would have it. And, that is how it shall  
continue..  
><br> 'Note: thank mother, if she's listening in whatever afterlife  
  
>there is, for that. Life with Saotome-san has never, never been  
boring.<br>  
> 'And the training trips keep me out of school. Dual thanks,  
mom.<br>

> 'And Father....'<br>  
> Ikari Shinji's further thoughts were jarred from him as  
the<br>train suddenly stopped. He disembarked, the only person  
aboard, and  
>silently set off for the next train he would need to take for  
Tokyo-3.<br>He hesitated for a moment, and turned to look over the  
surrounding  
>terminal, relapsing into thought.<br>  
> "Father.."<br>  
>[\_]~`\'-~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza One: Angel's Choir<br>  
> "We're sorry, but the Tokyo-3 telephone systems have been  
taken<br>off-line due to the emergency. Please remain in your  
shelter. Repeat:  
>The Tokyo-3 telephone systems have been ta-"<br>  
> Shinji set the pay-phone receiver back into its cradle  
gently.<br>Something was going on. Something big. He reached into the  
pocket in the  
>white Chinese pants he wore, removing a letter and a makeshift  
postcard.<br>The letter he had received from his father. As for the  
postcard.. it had  
>once been an enticing photo of a purple haired vixen, but its  
previous<br>owner had decided on using it as so much stationary.  
'I'll come and pick  
>you up, so please wait! Katsuragi Misato' was what it read. Well,  
that<br>and an arrow pointing at the woman's ample cleavage saying  
'P.S.: Take a  
>LOOK at this!'.<br>  
> The sporadic tremors started again; the faint  
vibrations<br>traveling through the sidewalk were slightly more  
pronounced this time.  
>Yes, something was going on, and that something was very wrong.<br>  
  
> An eerie silence slowly settled, and an almost tangible  
feeling<br>of apprehension lay thick in the air; Shinji suddenly  
wished it was  
>tangible, then he could just beat the crap out of it and his  
senses<br>could get out of their danger zones.  
><br> The tremors became immense, until they were audible. After  
  
>listening for a while, he decided that if one of the  
surrounding<br>skyscrapers had decided to get up and walk away, this  
would be the sound  
>it would make. The buildings were violently shaking with the  
tremors,<br>and nearby windows rattled. Shinji reflexively slipped  
into a defensive  
>stance, his years of Martial Arts training coming into the fore.  
His<br>warning sense screamed.  
><br> Someone was watching him from behind.  
><br> Shinji turned to face the person; his eyes narrowing as he saw  
  
>her, roughly 12 meters away. Blue hair, cute face, standard  
sea-green<br>girl's school uniform with a red bow tie, white socks,  
and black shoes.  
><br> An exceptionally large tremor struck, and his attention was  
  
>diverted to the -as yet unseen; lovely mountains, though- source to  
his<br>left. He looked back to the girl.  
><br> She was gone.  
><br> "Weir-" Tremor, "d-d-d-d-d-da.." Shinji turned back to the now

>seen source of the tremors. A monstrous black figure loomed over the<br>surrounding buildings, locked in unarmed combat with an equally  
>monstrous purple figure. Ikari Shinji summed it up as best he could.<br>  
> "Holy Schnikies!"<br>  
>[\_]~`\'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Misato belted the navigational-computer a good one. Said Navi-<br>comp flickered, beeped, and finally blinked the correct map of the area  
>on its screen..<br>  
> For all of twelve seconds.<br>  
> Misato growled. She wasn't having a good day.<br>  
> "G-r-r-r-r.. Stupid thing! Damn!! Why'd I have to lose him at a<br>time like this?!?" As she sighed, she noticed a guy sitting on the  
>sidewalk. The car skidded, slid, and came to a stop with a sickening<br>crunch. From the sidewalk, and now a full meter away, Shinji winced.  
><br> Misato opened the driver's side window. "Hey, You Ikari Shinji?"  
>The boy, dressed in a blue Chinese silk shirt and white pants, pulled<br>his attention from the sky and nodded weakly. "Good. Get.."  
  
><br> \*Swoosh\* \*Slam!\* \*Click\*  
><br> "..in." Misato blinked.  
><br> "If you wanna live.. I SUGGEST YOU DRIVE, VERY FAST, VERY  
  
>NOW!!!"<br>  
> "Huh?" It was then that Misato noticed the falling angel, the<br>end result of Unit-01's sloppy shoulder throw. Misato quickly threw the  
>vehicle into reverse. Tires squealed as rubber burned; and the car<br>screamed backwards, finally finding friction. Shinji white-knuckled the  
>dash as Misato chanted her mantra. "oh my god  
we'renotgonnamakeit<br>we'renotgonnamakeit, we'renotgonnamakeit..."  
  
><br> Sachiel slammed into the cement and surrounding buildings,  
  
>impacting into the ground with a large cracking sound. Misato's vehicle<br>barely avoided being smashed by debris before the shockwave caused an  
>upset, spilling the car onto its roof.<br>  
> For the briefest of moments, Shinji thought of moving to the<br>valley between two hills, as it was indeed a comfortable place to rest.  
>Misato, however, apparently didn't want anything to do with the change<br>of address forms; she pulled Shinji's head from her cleavage and scowled  
>at him.<br>  
> "Err.. Sorry?" he said, sheepishly.<br>  
> "I'll let it slide.. this time." She smiled wanly. "You should<br>really buckle up. For safety." The car shook for a second, then slowly  
>began to rise from the ground. It was turned right side up and placed<br>back down again.  
><br> Misato looked at the upside down Shinji, his head where his

feet

>should have been. "That looks painful.."<br>

> "Incredibly so.." Shinji squeaked. Misato mercifully opened the<br>door. Shinji tumbled out, tucked into a roll, and stood up - his neck

>bent to the right at a strange angle. "Thanks, I think.." Shinji winced<br>as he straightened his neck. "Oww."

><br> Misato poked her head out of the opened door. "Thanks, Rei!" She

>said, waving to the purple giant. Then to Shinji, "Come on, we gotta<br>go!"

><br> As Shinji re-situated himself into the vehicle, he asked "Just

>what is that thing?"<br>

> Misato hit the accelerator before answering. "The black one's an<br>Angel, and the purple one's the Eva. The Eva's on our side."

><br> Shinji blinked, then looked to Misato. "But, aren't Angel's

>supposed to be the messengers of God?"<br>

> Misato took a hand from the steering wheel, subconsciously<br>fingering the small white cross around her neck. Shinji watched her,

>awaiting an answer; and finally, after a few moments, she sighed.<br>

> "I just don't know any more. I just don't know..."<br>

>[\_]~`\- '~{[\_]

> ^ " ^<br>

> From inside Unit-01, Ayanami Rei watched the two depart.<br>Something inside both her and the Eva wanted to run to the boy's side,

>to protect him from any threat. "Why do I feel this way?" She asked to<br>no one in particular.

><br> While Rei was doing that introspection thing, Sachiel had picked

>himself up off the ground.<br>

> He was not in a good mood.<br>

> First those annoying 'Humans' had bothered him with their<br>'Airplanes'. Now this dark servant of the Lillim, who's soul was vying

>with the artificial soul of the rider for control - or, were they the<br>same? - had dared to throw him, HIM!, The covering of God, angel of the

>order of Hashmallim, resident of the first heaven (and sometimes<br>vacationer of the sixth), heir bringer of the dreaded Monday and

>wanderer of the south into a building??!? WELL, WE'LL JUST SEE ABOUT<br>THAT, NOW WONT WE, YOU FOOLISH PUNY PSEUDO-MORTAL?!?!?

><br> Sachiel ran, building momentum, interlacing the three digits of

>each hand to supply an

almighty-swinging-whap-to-the-back-of-the-head to<br>be felt by the artificial child's next clone. Rei, to her credit, turned

>Unit-01 just in time to see it coming.<br>

> \*GATSU!\*<br>

> The Eva spun head first into a building, collapsing a wall and<br>several floors. Sachiel followed his attack with an excellent 'Boot to

>the head' maneuver. It was a truly mighty kick, a kick to make all<br>previous Low Earth Orbit launching kicks look minuscule in comparison.  
>Not that anyone would ever bother to do such a comparison, mind you.<br>  
> Fortunately for Rei, the umbilical cable snapped taut, halting<br>the Eva's LEO ascent at 200 feet. And thus, the Evangelion came tumbling  
>down, unceremoniously crashing through an abortion clinic.<br>  
> Sachiel looked to the sky, leaving Unit-01 to crawl out of the<br>rubble. There was just something symbolic about two of man's own  
>creations destroying that which man used to destroy himself. Sachiel<br>shrugged, leaving the ways of God to be pondered at a later date.  
>Perhaps he could find some more of those 'Airplanes' to destroy..  
>[\_]~`\'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Ikari Gendou sat behind his desk, staring impassively at the<br>screens that displayed the battle before him. The reports began to come  
>in.<br>  
> "Pilot's blood pressure is dropping... Neural link is<br>reversing! ... A10 synchrograph is down 8 percent!! .... 3 minutes and  
  
>counting until Operation N2 ... She canna take much more o' this,<br>cap'ian!"  
><br> Gendou sighed. "It can't be helped. Commence recovery at  
  
>ludicrous speed through route I-5!"<br>  
> Hyuuga Makoto swiveled in his chair. "Sir, we can't! The<br>umbilical cable's locking mechanisms were damaged when it went taut; we  
>can't disengage it from here!"<br>  
> Ikari slammed his hands onto his desk. "Damn! Rei, disengage the<br>umbilical cable." After waiting for a few moments, he called again.  
>"Rei?"<br>  
> Ibuki Maya turned from her station. "Sir? Pilot Ayanami has lost<br>consciousness."  
><br> Defeated, Ikari Gendou slumped back into his chair. "It seems  
  
>Ikari's little toy is out of order.." One member of the military<br>advisory panel, seated behind him, scoffed.  
><br> "Perhaps it will be destroyed during Operation N2, and save us  
  
>the trouble of dismantling it..?" Said another.<br>  
> "Rest assured, gentlemen," Ikari intoned menacingly from his<br>chair, "It will remain unharmed from your small display of idiocy."  
><br> Fuyutsuki smirked, and added another point to Gendou's side of  
  
>the scoreboard.<br>  
> Unnoticed by all, Gendou pulled a copy of 'The Big, Big Book of<br>Angels, Including the Fallen Angels and Those Angels Most Likely To  
>Attack Large Cities' from his desk, placed it on his lap, and searched<br>through it. Finally, he copied something out of said book onto a piece

>of paper. He then turned the paper upside down and wrote 'this way up'<br>on the top. He placed the book back into its drawer and snapped for his pet.<br>  
> "Fuyutsuki!"<br>  
> The old professor was by Gendou's side in less than a moment.<br>"Yes sir?"  
><br> Ikari handed the slip of paper to his second, then resumed his normal sitting position. "This is the flight pattern for operation N2.<br>Be sure they follow it EXACTLY."  
><br> 'But this Sigil is...' Fuyutsuki frowned. "You're mocking him on purpose, aren't you?"<br>  
> Gendou simply smiled behind his hands. "Feh."<br>  
>[\_]~`\'-~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Lt. Phillips looked to his co-pilot, Lt. Yamamoto. "Are you sure<br>this flight pattern is correct?"  
><br> "Hey, that's what I said. But the guy's on the horn were insistent we follow it to the line, soo.."<br>  
> "Right.." Lt. Phillips rolled his eyes. Flipping on the con, he<br>announced: "All right, Bujoku Squadron, form up.."  
  
><br>[\_]~`\'-~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Sachiel stopped running, jumping, and generally causing massive<br>amounts of chaos, to cock his head to the side and blink in a destructive-as-all-get-out-but-cute kind of way as he noticed the<br>fighter planes of 'Operation N2'.  
><br> The Angel's left eye began to twitch and water. What kind of idiot bothers to write 'Sachiel' upside down in the sky?<br>  
> From inside of Nerv HQ, Commander Ikari smiled. The Angel had<br>stood perplexed long enough for the bomber to acquire a target lock  
>and launch the N2 mine.<br>  
>[\_]~`\'-~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "Ouch.. That HAD to Hurt.." Shinji said sympathetically for<br>Unit-01. "You said the purple one's on our side, right?"  
  
><br> Misato nodded. "Yep, that's right."  
><br> "Well.. I hate to say it, but.. It's getting beaten. Rather badly, too."<br>  
> Misato groaned. "..Oh, I told them not to place such a burden on<br>Rei. But did they listen, Nooo, sir - don't listen to Katty.."  
  
><br> Shinji waited for Misato to calm herself before asking another question. "Err.. Miss Katsuragi.. Why are the planes running away..?"<br>  
> Misato looked from the road she was speeding on long enough to<br>glance at Shinji, then followed his gaze. "oh shit." was all she said.  
><br> Unknown by all, Sachiel was thinking much the same thing.

><br> Then the world turned an interesting shade of off-pink...

><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_]

> ^ " ^<br>

> The government cronies were ecstatic. "Got it! .. Yes! ... We did<br>it! .. Nothing could have survived that, absolutely nothing! ... Such is

>the power of our N2 mines! ... Ha ha ha! .. Do you know what this means?<br>The Eva's are no longer necessary! ... More funding for us, yea!"

><br> And through the entire outburst, Ikari sat emotionless, staring

>at the screens. "Status report?"<br>

> "Continuing EMP shockwave interference from the explosion. We're<br>still on standby for target destruction confirmation!"

><br> One of the military advisers laughed. "With a blast of that

>force? Can there be any doubt?"<br>

> Hyuuga checked another monitor. "Sir! The blast has severed<br>Unit-01's umbilical cable. Beginning recovery through Route 66, due to

>extensive damage in Route I-5 and HWYS 99 & 32.."<br>

> Aoba Shigeru put down his manga long enough to shout, "Sir! I'm<br>getting energy readings from ground zero!"

><br> The entire military panel fell over in shock. "\_W\_H\_A\_T?!?"

><br> "Visuals are back online!"

><br> Sachiel stood in the epicenter of the crater, basking in the

>heat as his new head was formed. The Angel's only thought was 'Oww..'<br>

> Ikari smiled. "Indeed."<br>

> The military panel slowly sat down, each of its members at a<br>loss for words. "Our last gambit.. for nothing! ... We destroyed an

>entire city! ... It's a monster.. .... A demon.."<br>

> Ikari smirked. "As god created both, is it not fitting his<br>minions received such qualities as well?"

><br> As the board grumbled amongst themselves, one of them got off

>the Emergency Hot Line. "Ikari, HQ has informed me that total command of<br>this operation has been transferred to YOU. Don't Screw Up." And with

>that, the entire military panel, desk and all, sunk under the floor.<br>

> "There they go, playing turtle, and leaving us to do the hard<br>work.." complained Aoba.

><br> Ibuki and Hyuuga nodded in agreement; then paused, realizing

>just who they were agreeing with. Aoba studiously ignored the glares his<br>fellow techies directed at him as he returned to his manga.

><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_]

> ^ " ^<br>

> Shinji blinked his eyes furiously, trying to rid himself of the<br>flash-induced blindness. Fortunately for them both, Misato's sunglasses

>had spared her from the worst of it, and she had continued driving.<br>

> Feeling the inertia of the car slow, then speed up twice as fast  
>as before prompted him to say something. "Where are we?"

><br> "Car lift, express. Don't worry, we're almost there." She  
picked  
>up a packet and placed it on Shinji's lap. "Here, read this."<br>

> Shinji vainly rubbed his eyes, wishing he could see.<br>  
> He and Misato sighed at the same time. This caused Misato  
to<br>laugh. "What is it?"  
><br> "Miss Katsuragi.."  
><br> Misato waved her hand in a dismissive gesture, smiling. "Oh..

>don't worry about all that formal stuff. Just 'Misato' is fine."<br>

> He shrugged. "Can you tell me what my father does?"<br>  
> She blinked, twice (\*Squeegy-Squeegy\*). "You mean you  
don't<br>KNOW?"  
><br> He sighed again. "No.. not really. All Saotome-san ever said

>was.. 'He thinks it's important to the future of Humanity. Don't  
worry<br>to much 'bout it, though.'  
><br> "Saotome-san?"  
><br> Shinji nodded, his sight on the verge of returning. He turned  
to  
>the greater glob of grey that he figured -correctly- was Misato.  
"Yeah.<br>Saotome-san was my guardian, teacher, and foster father."  
His sight  
>finally returning, he looked at the pamphlet in his lap. "Nerv?  
What's<br>that?"  
><br> "It's a secret government organization directly under the

>control of the UN." Misato smiled and leaned forward to check her  
makeup<br>in the rear view mirror. "Hummn.. I work there, too -you  
know, as an  
>international civil servant.." She said, pulling out a compact  
and<br>powdering her nose. "So does your father. Ah.." She glanced  
over at  
>Shinji nervously, putting the compact back into her purse. "Your,  
err..  
>biological one, I mean."  
><br> Shinji chuckled slightly, shaking his head. "Don't worry. I  
know  
>who you mean when you're referring to my 'Father'." He shook his  
head<br>again, this time sadly. "So.. you're in 'the admirable job of  
defending  
>humanity', eh?"<br>

> Misato frowned. "What's with the sarcasm?"<br>  
> "I just don't think peace can be achieved through threat of  
a<br>greater force, that's all." He leaned back in his seat, idly  
flipping  
>through the pages of the pamphlet. "Heh.. 'One can only achieve  
true<br>peace after conquering oneself'." He said softly.  
><br> "You sound like a philosopher.."  
><br> Shinji smiled. "No, I'm just a Martial Artist.. Although it's

>been said that both are the same, after a fashion. Philosophy  
teaches<br>one the discipline of the mind, while Martial Arts teaches  
one the  
>disciplines of mind, body, and soul..." He trailed off.<br>  
> Misato watched Shinji with a bemused expression as the



Geo-front<br>came into view. Shinji's eyes widened as the buildings of Tokyo-3 cast  
>their shadows across the car lift, looking for a moment like the world<br>was standing on its head.  
><br> "Holy.. Schnikies!!" He whispered in English.  
><br> Misato caught it, but didn't understand. "'Shi.. nai.. kii..'?  
  
>What?"<br>  
> He blinked, coming out of his stupor. "Huh? Oh, That? It's just<br>an expression I picked up from one of Saotome-san's gaijin students."  
><br> "Ah."  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_}  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Rei slowly broke through the black veil of unconsciousness,<br>disoriented. It took her a moment to realize she was still within the  
>confines of the entry plug. Hurt. A world of Hurt. The feeling of her<br>head being used as a football. The pain of the Eva was the pain of the  
>pilot. She clutched her head and moaned, "Can you reduce this pain?"<br>  
> Her answer came as the pain retreated. Rei slowly blinked away<br>the tears, and watched as the saline floated upwards. She voiced her  
>thanks to the Eva, then wondered aloud. "Who was that man?"<br>  
> Again, the answer came unbidden into her soul. "Our Son?" A slow<br>smile played across Rei's features. "Shinji-kun.." Another thought came  
>into her, and she agreed whole heartedly. "We must protect him."<br>  
  
> "This," Both halves of Ikari Yui's soul vowed - Rei I and Eva<br>Unit-01 - "I will do unto death."  
>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_}  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "At last. It has begun." Said the monolithic holograph labeled<br>'SOUND ONLY - SEELE 08'.  
><br> "Yes," Said another, identical except for the number: SEELE 04.  
  
>"The angels have attacked us, after only fifteen years."<br>  
> "Perhaps we should have lent more.. enthusiasm to our 'Requests'<br>of the UN. The situation is acceptable, but if there is a loss now.."  
>SEELE 07 allowed the rest to go unsaid, leaving the others to their own<br>dark speculations..  
><br> The twelve SEELE monoliths sat silent for a moment, all but one  
  
>questioning their actions. SEELE 01 spoke. "It is too late now for<br>speculation. We have committed ourselves to this course, and there is no  
>possibility of turning back."<br>  
> Several other monoliths grumbled agreement, a few opting to stay<br>silent.  
><br> "What is the status of the First Child?" SEELE 06 queried.  
  
><br> "The pilot of Unit One is becoming mentally unstable, as in  
  
>accordance to the plan." SEELE 04 answered, adding: "The reserve pilot,<br>and his value to us, is still an unknown."  
><br> At this, SEELE 01 chuckled. "He is Ikari's son, and therefore

>his value is immeasurable to us. Besides, if he does prove  
troublesome,<br>we can eliminate him -since we have the Second Child  
already in our  
>thrall, due to Agent R."<br>  
> "Ah, yes.. Her." SEELE 12 blanched behind his monolith.  
"I<br>believe you place too much value upon her. Elimination of the  
Third  
>Child should only come as a last resort. There are, as they say,  
more<br>than two ways to persuade a cat's-pawn."  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza One: Angel's Choir<br> End

## 2. Honor's Duty Stanza Two

\*\*\*\*

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><br>Ludicrous Configuration! Productions  
> Presents<br>A Neon Genesis Evangelion Alternate Universe  
> By JJ Corley<br>  
> "God keep thee, thy works, and all thy transgressions;  
for<br>verily as ye shall sow, so shall ye reap."  
> Commander Ikari Gendou sighed. That damn headache was back,  
and<br>the third Angel, Sachiel, would recover -only to resume in  
drawing ever  
>closer when it did. 'Great. Juuust wonderful. As If I really needed  
to<br>give SEELE a reason to chew my ass off.'  
><br> Movement caught his eye, and he spared a glance at the

>surveillance monitor built into his desk. The forms of Misato and  
a<br>young man played across it for a brief moment, before the image  
cycled

>again.<br>

> His son had arrived; action could now be taken against  
the<br>Angel.

><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza Two: Retrograde<br>

> "What is Eva Unit One's current status?"<br>

> Hyuuga paused in mid-type to look at Ibuki. Ibuki did  
likewise<br>to look at Hyuuga. They both looked at Aoba.

><br> Aoba giggled behind his tokuban as Youta was berated, once

>again, by Ai for hurting Moemi-chan's feelings. Gotta love that  
classic<br>Manga.

><br> Hyuuga shrugged, punched a few buttons, and took a sip of his

>Dr. Pepper as the relevant data began to scroll in. "Unit One should  
be<br>in the cage in T-Minus four minutes and counting, sir. Pilot  
Ayanami has

>regained consciousness, and has reported no serious injuries. Once

in<br>the cage, Unit One can be prepped and ready in two minutes."

><br> Gendou absorbed the information without a word. Then he stood.

>"Fuyutsuki, handle this."<br>

> "Yes, sir."<br>

> From his left, a new voice emerged. "Commander.. May I ask your<br>intentions?"

><br> Gendou paused, turning to face her. "Yes, Dr. Akagi, you may. We

>are going to reinitialize both Units."<br>

> "I needn't remind you that you're short a pilot."

Fuyutsuki<br>said.

><br> "Unit Zero hasn't even been fully activated yet.. we have tests

>yet to perform, and the second Rei.."<br>

> "Her name is Kizuko, Dr. Akagi. You seem to forget that."<br>

> "..has not yet recovered from your failed experiment with Unit<br>One." Ritsuko continued, undaunted.

><br> "I know."

><br> "Also, the first Rei seems to be unduly suffering from some

>psychological battle.. Her synchrograph was down four points yesterday,<br>and another five before launch today."

><br> "Hummn.. I see." Came the standard, uncaring reply.

><br> "Do you? Do you \_Really\_?" Ritsuko narrowed her eyes at the

>commander. Sometimes, she wanted to scream at how callous the man could<br>be. She knew Gendou cared for the Ayanami clones, but he seemed to be

>damned and determined to contradict - or.. could it be to hide? - those<br>feelings in how he acted towards them. "You don't seem to realize how

>serious this truly is. If this keeps up, she will no longer be a viable<br>pilot for either Unit." Ritsuko shook her head. "I simply can't see how

>we are to survive this."<br>

> "That is why I am the Commander and you are not. The..

'Reserve'<br>pilot has arrived. He is currently with Captain Katsuragi. Dr. Akagi:

>you will find them, then bring them to the Cage. I will be there<br>shortly."

><br> "And what are you going to do?" asked Fuyutsuki.

><br> Gendou sighed. "If you must know, I shall be in the lavatory."

><br> Fuyutsuki and Ritsuko both blinked. They looked to each other,

>and then to the Commander. All Fuyutsuki could think to say was "Oh."<br>

> Grumbling, the Commander strode behind the guard rails of his<br>personal lift; He hit the button and slowly descended from view.

><br> When the lift doors swished shut, Fuyutsuki turned to Ritsuko.

>"Their first meeting in ten years..."<br>

> "Who? The Commander and the toilet?" She snarked.<br>

> Fuyutsuki giggled like a drunken college boy just released from<br>an all night drinking binge. This drew more than a few looks from the

>console techs. "That too. But seriously, though."<br>

> "Yeah. To think that the reserve pilot is the Commander's  
own<br>son." Ritsuko shook her head sadly. "I just hope Gendou knows  
what he's  
>doing."<br>  
> "As do we all." Fuyutsuki whispered as the doctor left. "As  
do<br>we all."  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Footsteps echoed in empty corridors, rebounded off the walls  
of<br>gargantuan chambers, and stopped for the occasional escalator  
or two.  
>Continually. In that order.<br>  
> "Are you sure you know where we're going?"<br>  
> Misato growled at Shinji, her patience waning. "Of course I  
am!<br>We'll be there in a few minutes!"  
><br> Her younger companion rolled his eyes. "Riiight. That's why  
  
>we've been wandering around in circles.." He paused as a pair of  
doors<br>swished open diagonally, then continued. ".. Oh, look:  
There's junction  
>J-34 AGAIN; that's what? 5 times in as many minutes?"<br>  
> Misato turned on her heel and glared at him. "Oh, SHUT UP!  
Just<br>be quiet and follow me, OK?"  
><br> Shinji wisely stayed silent; that is, until junction J-34 came  
  
>into view for the sixth time. "We're hopelessly lost. Give me the  
map."<br>  
> Misato complied, handing it to him over her shoulder with  
a<br>disgruntled 'Fine'. Shinji looked at it for a moment, then  
turned it  
>sideways. They passed a door - which, oddly enough, was clicking  
-<br>before Shinji asked the important question. "Just where ARE we  
going,  
>anyway?"<br>  
> The answer of "Nowhere, fast" came from behind him, catching  
him<br>by surprise. He turned quickly to face the newcomer, wondering  
how she  
>had snuck up on him. It was embarrassingly obvious: The clicking  
doors<br>had been an elevator; standing inside was an attractive  
woman with blond  
>hair. Shinji looked her over: lab coat, a high-collared blue silk  
shirt<br>with a pull-ring zipper and a black skirt. She also wore a  
look of mild  
>annoyance.<br>  
> "You're late, CAPTAIN Katsuragi."<br>  
> Her tone carried 'mild' annoyance to new levels. Misato  
winced.<br>"Eh heh heh.. Hi ya, Ritsuko.."  
><br> "So late.." Ritsuko continued, "That they sent ME to find you.  
  
>We don't have the time or the man power for this."<br>  
> "Well, I.. You know.. I mean-"<br>  
> Ritsuko sighed, cutting her friend off. She then glanced  
at<br>Shinji, who was nonchalantly leaning against the corridor wall,  
watching  
>them. "Is this him? The Third Child?"<br>  
> "Yes. Shinji, introduce yourself."<br>  
> Shinji nodded, came forward, and bowed. "I'm Ikari  
Shinji.<br>Pleased to meet you."  
><br> Ritsuko, slightly amused, bowed somewhat. "Akagi Ritsuko.

>Resident Doctor, Scientist, and Supervisor of Project E. If you have any<br>questions, please feel free to ask. My door is open, if you need to see  
>me at anytime."<br>  
> "Thank you. I'll try to remember that."<br>  
> "Well then, since we are currently under attack, I think we<br>should be going. Don't you, Captain?"  
><br> Misato nodded, then folded her arms. Her head fell and the  
  
>normally hyper-cheerful Misato became rather somber. "Is the Commander<br>still planning to..?"  
><br> "Yes, and no."  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Ayanami Rei tiredly crawled out of the entry plug and onto the<br>surrounding catwalks. She set her shaking frame down and leaned her back  
>against the purple giant's shoulder. She was weary.<br>  
> But it was more than that.<br>  
> 'No time for such thoughts now,' she chided herself mentally as<br>she pulled her knees up to her chest, the material of the plug suit  
>making a squishy scrunching sound. Her body, mind, and soul were<br>fatigued. The constant testing, probing, analyzing, scynchrograph  
>readings, and now live combat.. all had taken their toll on her.<br>  
  
> She desperately needed a break, but as long as she was the only<br>one who could pilot the Eva, she could not rest. Piloting is what she  
>would have to do.<br>  
> A familiar shadow fell across her, and she addressed it without<br>looking. "Is this why he is here? Shinji? Will you make him ride as  
>well?"<br>  
> Ikari Gendou sighed. He had to tell her. He owed her that much.<br>"I will give him the choice I could not afford to give you."  
  
><br> "And if he refuses?" She asked, looking up to the older man.  
  
>Gendou's gaze softened slightly. Rei's hair fell into her eyes, only<br>slightly masking the tears which began to fall. She knew the answer, but  
>she also knew she would fail. And her demise would mean Shinji's as<br>well.  
><br> Gendou supplied the answer she dreaded.  
><br> "Then you shall pilot it again.. alone."  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "First wave personnel to battle stations!" The P.A. screeched,<br>"Repeat, first wave personnel to battle stations!!"  
  
><br> Ritsuko removed her gaze from the speaker above to her  
  
>companions on the stairs below. "It must be moving again."<br>  
> "The angel?" Shinji queried as he reached the doctor's level,<br>Misato gasping not far behind.  
><br> "Prepare to launch Anti-Ground Attack Units One and Zero!" the  
  
>P.A. system belched before Ritsuko could answer. From behind him,

Shinji<br>could hear Misato groan.

><br> "They.. \*gasp!\*; have got to be.. kidding.." Said the wheezing

>captain as she tried to regain her breath. "..Right? Rei's probably..  
<br>injured and Unit Zero hasn't even been fully activated yet.."

><br> "It has a point zero eight one one seven nine four percent

>chance of activating.."<br>

> "That's not even a full numeral!" Misato countered.<br>

> "Still, it's not a negative. And if we can activate two units at<br>once.."

><br> "Save your survivability profiles for someone who cares.

>Kizuko's still in the hospital, so you don't have a pilot." At this,<br>Ritsuko remained silent - yet that was all the answer Misato needed. She

>covered her mouth and suppressed the cry of grief and outrage she could<br>feel swelling within her breast. "Oh my god.." she murmured, "You were

>right. The Commander really is going to.. \*Haaa\*" she gasped, realizing<br>just who could over hear her. Shinji's eyes narrowed slightly.

><br> "The final choice isn't the Commander's.." Ritsuko whispered

>fiercely to her friend as she took her aside, "It's HIS."<br>

> `Something is going on here..` Shinji thought as a faint<br>vibration swept through the building. He looked high over head to see

>the ceiling lights slowly begin to sway. `Why do I get the feeling I'm<br>going to regret ever receiving that letter?` He asked himself. Then

>aloud, "Shouldn't we get going?"<br>

> Ritsuko turned her head, speaking to him over her shoulder.

"We<br>are here. We only need to take the final step. Are you ready, Misato?"

><br> As the younger woman nodded, Ritsuko strode forward and swiped a

>card through a reader. It beeped, and the wall next to the landing<br>pulled apart into darkness. Shinji, not knowing what else to do, vainly

>attempted to follow Ritsuko's advice of watching his step as the three<br>of them entered. The massive door closed, and all was silent.

><br> The lights came on with a resounding \*ClacK!\*, and Shinji found

>himself looking into the glassy surface of a single, cycloptic eye.<br>

> "'Holy Schinikies!' What is this?" He asked in awe.<br>

> "This," A voice emerged from the shadows above the yellow giant,<br>"Is Evangelion Unit Zero. And you, Ikari Shinji, shall pilot it."

><br> Shinji forced his eyes from the Eva's blank stare to meet the

>unwavering gaze of Ikari Gendou. "Father.."<br>

> From the observation window above, Gendou cracked a small smile.<br>"Been awhile, eh?"

><br> Shinji stared up at his father with his mouth open for a few

>moments. Then he began to laugh. It was a hollow, haunting sound

with no<br>mirth involved. It was a sound born from cynicism. It was wholly  
>inappropriate for the situation, but it continued.<br>  
> Ritsuko glanced at Misato, who raised an eyebrow and shrugged at<br>the unasked question. (What's going on? I don't know, ask him.) Ritsuko  
>frowned, and Misato shook her head. (I'm not going to ask him, You ask<br>him. Nah-uh, you're the one who cares, YOU ask.) Ritsuko sighed, Misato  
>striking a victory pose - which she quickly dropped at the Commander's<br>disapproving glance and Ritsuko's glare. (Alright.. I'll ask him. Heh, I  
>won again! Hey, I heard that! You Idiots.)<br>  
> During this unspoken exchange, Shinji had stopped laughing.<br>"That is just so like you, Father! You don't give a damn about me for ten  
>years; then when you have a use for me, you whistle." He said quietly,<br>staring at his shoes. As he lifted his gaze to meet that of his  
>father's, he continued, "Do you really expect me to always jump at your<br>beck and call? This is your one chance. You have forty five seconds to  
>convey just WHY I am needed here. And it had DAMN well better be good,<br>Father." Gendou smiled, and his eyes narrowed at his father's bemused  
>expression.<br>  
> "Shinji, You will use the Evangelion to battle the angel. Why?<br>Because if you do not, all of mankind shall perish in fiery oblivion."  
><br> Shinji folded his arms across his chest and let go of the anger  
  
>inside of him. "All right. Clocks' stopped, you have my attention. Now<br>explain: Why am I needed to do this?"  
><br> Before Gendou could answer, another voice emerged from the  
  
>shadows, along with its owner. Shinji recognized her. It was the girl<br>from the street.  
><br> "I can't do this alone. That is why you are needed." She said.  
  
>She was dressed in what appeared to be a wet suit, and crossed her arms<br>around her stomach. "I am Ayanami Rei. First child, and designated pilot  
>of Evangelion Unit One. And if you will not help me to defeat this<br>threat.. then I will die, alone, in the attempt."  
><br> A brief look of concern flashed across Shinji's face, his left  
  
>arm falling to the side while the other gestured towards Rei. "Wait..<br>You were the pilot of the purple robot, right?"  
><br> "Strictly speaking, these are not robots." Ritsuko informed from  
>behind him. "They are man made, all purpose weapons for the war to end<br>all wars.. Artificial Human Evangelion."  
><br> Shinji almost jumped out of his skin. "'ARTIFICIAL HUMAN'?!? Is  
  
>that why you have them so restrained? Are they going to get up and walk<br>away?"  
><br> "You may rest assured, that while such an improbable thing, in  
  
>most variables, could never occur.. It is still a possibility; and no<br>matter how remote that possibility may be, we must be

cautious." Gendou  
>said.<br>  
> Shinji turned to his father. 'That is the stupidest crock  
of<br>shit I've ever heard..' He thought. 'If a chicken can live with  
only the  
>lower portion of its cerebellum intact, then what of us?' "How do  
you<br>plan on controlling these.. 'Evangelions'?"  
><br> A brief tremor shook the building, and Gendou attempted to  
  
>briefly explain. "We have devised a system which we call the  
'Entry<br>Plug', a large cylindrical device in which a pilot is  
enclosed, and then  
>inserted into the Unit's spinal cord. Without the plug, none of  
the<br>impulses from the brain of the Unit may get through. With the  
plug, the  
>pilot serves as the brain of the Unit."<br>  
> "And what if the pilot is knocked unconscious? Or if there is  
no<br>pilot inside this 'Entry Plug'?"  
><br> "Then.." Rei began, hesitating slightly, "There is the  
  
>possibility of the unit going berserk. Or rather.. of the  
Unit<br>controlling itself, as do you and I. If such a thing were to  
occur.. I  
>only hope the Evangelions will fight for us." Rei hugged  
herself<br>tightly. "If not.. then humanity may be twice damned.."  
  
><br> "... " Shinji shook his head. "I don't like this one bit. This  
  
>entire situation reeks of disaster." Out of the corner of his eye,  
he<br>could almost see Rei's spirit fall. "But.. I'll help you. Under  
  
>three conditions."<br>  
> "What are they?"<br>  
> "One: I'm on the pay roll."<br>  
> "Agreed."<br>  
> "Two: There is no way this side of your personal hell that  
I'm<br>going to live with you."  
><br> "Of course."  
><br> "Three: Tell me. Is this why you sent me to be trained? Answer  
  
>me, Father! Is this the purpose you had for me all along?!?"<br>  
> Gendou shook his head. "Your training was your mother's idea.  
if<br>you have a complaint, register it now. If not, then prepare  
yourself for  
>battle."<br>  
> His fists clenched tightly, he had known his training was due  
to<br>his mother. And through it all, Shinji had but one question.  
"Why? Why  
>did she place me on this path?"<br>  
> It was Rei who gave him the answer he had both wanted, and  
yet<br>had also known all along.  
><br> "A Martial Artist's duty, his honor, lies not with himself, but  
  
>in helping and protecting those in need - those who cannot, or will  
not,<br>defend themselves - to the best of his ability. In this, and  
for this,  
>you have been trained; have you not?"<br>  
> Shinji dropped his head and closed his eyes. 'Mother knew  
this<br>was going to happen all along..' he shook his head, then  
turned to



>Ritsuko. "I'll do it."<br>  
> Rei silently came from behind him, and he only registered her<br>presence as she touched his back. "Thank you." She said. Then she was  
>gone.<br>  
> Gendou, high above, smiled a slow resentful smile. It would<br>work.  
><br> It had to.  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "So then, Shinji.. You understand the reason behind this test?"<br>Ritsuko asked over the comm.  
><br> From the confines of Unit-00's entry plug, He nodded. "With the  
  
>Angel above, making sure I'm able to pilot seems like a good idea..  
But<br>I'm still not clear on how to pilot this.." Shinji gestured around  
>himself, "..Thing.."<br>  
> From inside Unit-01's entry plug, and already inserted into the<br>Eva, Rei smiled. "Think, and it shall be done. But do not dwell on the  
>goal, but of the very essence of the action you wish to take."<br>  
  
> "Oh, THAT helps. Might as well tell me to run on instinct.." He<br>muttered.  
><br> "Shinji: Run on instinct." Said a voice over the comm.  
><br> Shinji narrowed his eyes as the door of the entry plug swung  
  
>into position. "Oh, Thanks Father. You're a REAL help."<br>  
> "Don't mention it. Inject the entry plug!" From his desk in the<br>command center of Nerv, Gendou watched as Ibuki swiftly complied.  
><br> "Roger! Inserting entry plug!" Maya's fingers flew across the  
  
>keys, routing commands to the Magi and other sub-systems. "Plug lock-in<br>procedure complete! Initiating first contact and flooding entry plug!"  
><br> Inside Unit-00, Shinji was immensely glad for that liquid oxygen  
>dive training last summer, but found it amazing that he could still<br>talk. "What in the hell? It this even..? It isn't! You know this is  
>physically impossible, don't you?!"<br>  
> A small box with Ritsuko inside popped into his view. "Just<br>except it."  
><br> "But..!" It was obvious he couldn't.  
><br> "Look, just except the fact and get on with it!"  
><br> "But I..!"  
><br> "No 'But's!"  
><br> "I! You! GyAh.." Shinji's arms waived wildly, his hands forming  
  
>several interesting gestures. He tensed for a moment, then let it go.<br>"Yes ma'am.." he sighed in abject defeat.  
><br> "Better."  
><br> The box winked out of existence as weird things began to  
  
>happen.. First floating words, then some type of graph followed by<br>sparkling lights.. Shaking his head, he tried to focus on Ibuki's voice  
>and concentrated on not having a bad trip.<br>

> The lightshow stopped and the world became red, almost a blood<br>colored sheen. Shinji waited a moment, believing this to be normal.  
><br> Then it spoke. Not in words, but in images flashing through his  
  
>mind with an intensity akin to a raging fire. Shinji couldn't help the<br>small gasp of pain and surprise.  
><br> It was Hers. Not Rei, but someone identical to her. This was her  
>Eva, her soul had taken the Evangelion's massive bulk as its own<br>residence. He screamed in pain as it attempted to rip out the very thing  
>which made him Human and replace it with what, to his distorted<br>perceptions, seemed nothing more than a man made mockery.  
><br> Then the invasion stopped. An image appeared in his field of  
  
>vision, flawless white skin and blue hair an almost painful contrast to<br>the red ichor he floated in.  
><br> \You do not have permission\  
> \Why are you here, He Who Is The One\  
> He struggled with the pain and his mind to find an answer,<br>barely able to believe what was happening. "To prevent the death of the  
>innocent.. It's my obligation now! I must go, lemme go!"<br>  
> \Why should I comply with you, He Who Is The One\  
> `This is insane..` he told himself, shaking his head to clear<br>it. "I don't have an answer for that, I don't even know what's going on  
>here! Just let me go! If you don't," He gestured around, "None of this<br>will matter! She won't exist! We'll all die!  
><br> \That is your perception, He Who Is The One\  
><br> Shinji blinked in confusion. "What do you mean, my perception?  
  
>The Angel is here!"<br>  
> \So it would seem<br> \What would He Who Is The One have me do about it?\  
><br> "Just let me go kill the damn thing already! You're wasting  
  
>time!"<br>  
> The image of the Rei look-alike smiled ruefully for a moment<br>before speaking again.  
><br> \I shall help He Who Is The One, I shall give He Who Is The One  
  
>the knowledge needed to Ride<br> \Be warned, however\  
> \Come inside me again without permission and I shall destroy the<br>soul of He Who Is The One\  
><br> "Just what the hell do you mean by that?"  
><br> Shinji received no answer as the world seen through the eye of  
  
>an Eva came sharply into focus; Ibuki's voice faded rapidly, saying:<br>"Opening reciprocal circuits."  
><br> He found his head swimming with pain, and a dark sense of  
  
>foreboding took root within his soul. Surprisingly, no time seemed to<br>have elapsed while he was in communication with Unit-00. He wanted to  
>say something about what had happened - although, try as he might, his<br>voice failed him. Just what could he say that wouldn't sound like a

>frightened child making lame excuses to get out of saving the world?<br>  
> In the end, Shinji hardened his resolve and said nothing.  
No<br>matter what, the Angel would die, and that was all that truly mattered  
>at the moment.<br>  
> Wasn't it?<br>  
>[\_]~`\'-~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> From inside the control room, Ritsuko was in shock. "This.. is<br>amazing.." She whispered. "Synchro errors are within point two percent..  
>It's going to work!" She said, turning to Misato.<br>  
> "But, can we REALLY do this to him?" Misato turned to the<br>commander, knowing even as she asked what the answer would be.  
  
><br> "Of course. If we fail to defeat the angels, Humanity has no  
  
>future. Proceed, captain Katsuragi."<br>  
> Misato turned back to Ritsuko. "Are the Eva's ready?"<br>  
> "Primary and secondary restraints have been released, and all<br>preparations are complete."  
><br> "Gates 4 and 5 are clear, Eva's loaded and ready for launch  
  
>sequence." Ibuki added.<br>  
> "Then let's do this.." Misato muttered. "Evangelion Units Zero<br>and One, Launch!"  
><br> Inside Unit-00, Shinji scowled as the electromagnetic rail  
  
>system sent the Eva rocketing towards the surface. In less than a<br>moment, he was above ground, Unit-01 some distance to his right. But  
>that was not what concerned him, it was the Angel.<br>  
> Sachiel blinked both sets of eyes. Very disconcerting, rather,<br>yes. Either this four-eye thing had him seeing double, or there really  
>were two of these dark servants of the Lillim.<br>  
> `Wait a minute,` Sachiel blinked again, recognizing the battle<br>between the purple servant's soul and that of its rider which was absent  
>from the orangeyellow servant, `those is two dark servants of the  
  
>Lillim`<br>  
> That thought was quickly followed by another as Sachiel sized<br>the orange/yellow servant up. The servant's soul seemed to be almost  
>complementing that of the riders, although the link between them was non<br>existent. And as for the rider..  
><br> Shinji glared at the Angel, wanting nothing more than for the  
  
>final safety locks to release, so he could jump on it and pummel it to<br>death. Unit-00 did as Shinji did, its single eye reflecting the  
  
>surrounding light in an almost ominous manner.<br>  
> Sachiel began to sweat. `Oh, shit.`<br>  
>[\_]~`\'-~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "Release final safety locks! Rei, concentrate on the Angel.<br>Shinji, I want you to try-"  
><br> "Negative, Captain!" Came Rei's voice from the comn, "The

>Angel's ignoring me, it's heading straight towards Shinji!"<br>  
> Misato's eyes widened. "What?!? Rei, stop the Angel!"<br>  
> Unit-01 ran from its harness, coming along side Sachiel.  
Rei<br>made a grab for the Angel, but it evaded, turning on her.

><br> Inside Unit-00, Shinji narrowed his eyes. "Let's do this." He  
>said, confusing the entire Command staff.<br>  
> "Shinji, what do yo.." Misato started, only to drop off as  
the<br>Evangelion leapt into the air. Ritsuko dropped her pencil, the  
sound  
>echoing through the silent command center.<br>  
> "He.. He shouldn't be able to do that.." The doctor murmured.<br>

> As Unit-00 came down on Sachiel with a mighty kick,  
Misato<br>agreed with as much intelligence she could muster.  
"Uh-huh."  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza Two: Retrograde<br> End

### 3. Honor's Duty Stanza Three

\*\*\*\*

> Disclaimer: The original Neon Genesis Evangelion belongs  
to<br>Gainax. This particular plot deviation was constructed by me,  
JJ Corley,  
>and has been dubbed an 'Alternate Universe (AU)'. Therefore, the  
term<br>Alternate Universe or AU shall serve as my disclaimer for any  
future  
>posting of this series. Do not sue me, for if you do you'll only get  
a<br>few bucks and an old 486DX with a copy of edit.com. What A  
Prize. I've  
>made my point.<br> \*\*\*\*

><br>Ludicrous Configuration! Productions  
> Presents<br>A Neon Genesis Evangelion Alternate Universe  
> By JJ Corley<br>  
> "Hurry up and wait."<br>  
> Evangelion: Honor's Duty<br>  
> She was dead. Ayanami.<br>  
> Shinji could only stare at the silent form of Evangelion  
Unit-<br>01, slumped lifelessly against the building before him.  
Blood and LCL  
>mixed in the street, the Unit's brain and throat punctured by  
the<br>Angel's attack.  
><br> The moment stretched into an eternity where pain, grief, and  
>regret reformed themselves to create a rosary of self hatred  
and<br>depression unlike anything the young man had ever experienced  
before. It  
>tasted like a garlic bagel.<br>  
> Sachiel leapt into action while Shinji gagged.<br>  
> The first blow was caught, as was the second. Unit-00  
slowly<br>rotated its head as Shinji turned his own to see the Angel.  
Unit-00  
>regarded the Angel before itself before the external speakers  
relayed<br>its pilot's words to Sachiel.  
><br> "damn you."  
><br> It came out as an almost inaudible mutter, his tone and being

>laced with anguish. "Another.. Damn you."<br>  
> Sachiel stumbled backwards as Unit-00 released its hands.  
The<br>wretched agony of bagel flavor coursing through Shinji's soul  
began to  
>decay into a cold fury. The Eva slipped into an offensive stance as  
its<br>pilot made ready to attack.  
><br> The Angel began to fear bread.  
><br>[\_]~'\-/ '~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza Three: A Silent Tear<br>  
> Inside the control room, things had been in a panic since  
Unit-<br>01 had gone silent.  
><br> "What do you mean, The Eva's not responding?!"  
><br> "That's just what it is, Captain! We're getting absolutely no

>readings from either Unit One or Ayanami! There's NOTHING, the Eva  
is<br>completely silent!" Hyuuga punched his console in frustration.

><br> "Eject the entry plug!" Ritsuko commanded.  
><br> "Not possible! There's no manual override!" Ibuki explained.

><br> Fuyutsuki turned from the panic below to his commanding  
officer.  
>"Well.. It can't get any worse." Their attention was diverted to  
Misato<br>as she moaned in despair.  
><br> Unit-00 had less than three minutes of internal power  
remaining.  
><br> "Fuyutsuki.."  
><br> "Sir?"  
><br> "Never say that again."  
><br> "Eh.. y.. yes, sir."  
><br>[\_]~'\-/ '~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> The first few blows were placed squarely upon the Angel's  
core,<br>well before Sachiel was even aware of Unit-00 moving. It  
stumbled back  
>even further, doubled over in pain, only to be sent to the ground  
by<br>Shinji's kick.  
><br> From within the entry plug, Shinji cursed as the Angel dodged

>his next attack, only to widen his eyes in surprise on seeing a beam  
of<br>destructive light emanate from his enemy. He quickly rolled to  
the left,  
>taking shelter behind another building; only to move again as it,  
too,<br>was destroyed.  
><br> Sachiel picked itself off the ground and pressed forward,  
timing  
>its blasts to keep the dark servant on the defensive. It stepped  
on,<br>then over the severed umbilical cable as Unit-00 moved around  
and behind  
>it.<br>  
> Shinji smiled, grabbed the cord, pulled, and schlap! The  
Angel<br>was down. "Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk!"  
><br> Inside the command center, Fuyutsuki turned to Gendou and  
asked,  
>"Do you think that was Larry, Moe, or Curly?"<br>  
> "Actually, I thought it was Shemp."<br>  
> The professor frowned for a moment. "... Oh yeah..."<br>  
> "I need a weapon." Shinji announced coolly over the comn, as  
he<br>placed as much distance between himself and the Angel as

possible.

><br> "You have a minute and thirty remaining." Came his father's

>voice. "There is an umbilical cable locker and a weapons locker two<br>hundred meters behind you. Finish this quickly, and rescue Ayanami."

><br> Cold fire burned behind Shinji's eyes as he followed Ikari

>Gendou's directions. The door to the Umbilical cable slid up as he<br>approached, and he connected it without a second thought, turning his

>attention to the weapons locker before him.<br>

> His emotions flowed into one as he laid eyes upon the<br>progressive sword within.

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> Blackness. A complete and utter void, absorbing any and all<br>light; absorbing her soul.

><br> It would win, if she allowed it to. She knew that. She had

>promised her life for his, and had delivered. Only it wasn't enough.<br>

> `It never is,` She mused, forcibly pulling herself back from the<br>brink of the infinite again. `It never shall be.`

><br> \Be comforted. You are not alone. Go to him.\

><br> `Why?`

><br> \Because he is the one\

><br> `What the ^&@\*%# does that mean?!`

><br> Then nothing.

><br>[\_]~'\-/'~{[\_]

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> One must fall. Man or Angel, almost like an Epic MegaGame.<br>

> Sachiel stood, ready for attack. He refused to fail in his<br>divine errand. Shinji waited, ready; his weapon raised, poised for the

>strike. He would survive.<br>

> Sachiel rushed forward, closing the gap between them, bringing<br>the same beam weapon into play that had killed Ayanami. Shinji narrowed

>his eyes, the monstrous katana weaving through the air faster than the<br>eye could follow, deflecting Sachiel's attempts and leaving the Angel

>open. The progressive sword struck out in a wide arc, bisecting the<br>Angel diagonally.

><br> Sachiel shuddered, and split, his torso landing upright on the

>pavement with a loud \*Splorch\*.<br>

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> Everyone within the command center fixed their gaze upon the<br>main screen in awe. From behind his hands, Commander Ikari smiled. "It

>is over."<br>

> The much shorter, and now deceased, Angel appeared to scratch<br>its head in disbelief.

><br> Unit-00 quickly ran to the prone form of Unit-01. Ritsuko

>instructed Shinji on how to remove the entry plug before turning to<br>Ibuki. "Is there..?"

><br> Maya shook her head sadly. "I'm still receiving nothing from

>pilot Ayanami.. We may have lost her."<br>  
>[\_}~'\-'\~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Shinji tried to ignore the gaping hole in the side of the entry<br>plug as he pulled on the emergency release lever. "please be alright,  
>please be alright, please be alright" he chanted as the lever began to<br>turn, as if by him willing it to be so, it would.  
><br> The lever spun suddenly, the door popped open and LCL flooded  
  
>out, tinged red by blood. He quickly pulled the door aside, and stared<br>in horror.  
><br> He crawled inside the dark confines of the entry plug, his  
  
>unsteady hand checking for a pulse on the girl's neck, brushing past the<br>gaping wound in her shoulder. Her left arm had either completely  
>disintegrated, or was floating somewhere in the LCL; Shinji was too<br>preoccupied to check.  
><br> There was a pulse. Slight, and growing fainter. Shinji quickly  
  
>removed his belt and made a rough tourniquet around the remains of her<br>arm.  
><br>[\_}~'\-'\~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Gendou stood before the observation window, watching as the<br>medical scanners revolved around the nude and barely conscious form of  
>Rei Ayanami. "Will she recover?"<br>  
> Ritsuko studied him briefly before returning her attention to<br>the data being gathered. "Well.." She hesitated for a moment, attempting  
>to bring her own feelings for the girl under control; "In terms of<br>healing her.. we will be able to replace the limb.. but the shoulder to  
>arm muscle structure has me more concerned."<br>  
> Gendou huffed impatiently. "Will she or not?"<br>  
> "Of course." She frowned at him. "What we can't fix, we'll<br>replace. However, she may never be able to use her left arm again. Until  
>she undergoes proper therapy, and regains full control of the arm, she<br>will not be a truly viable pilot."  
><br> "How long."  
><br> "Without complications? Four months to a year."  
><br> On the examination table, Rei grimaced in pain as the scanner  
  
>came too close to her wounded shoulder. Gendou's eyes hardened. "No<br>sooner?"  
><br> "No."  
><br> An awkward moment passed between them. Ritsuko glanced at the  
  
>data feed, then back to Gendou. "If your son hadn't been so resourceful,<br>she would have been dead long before I even saw her."  
  
><br> "I know."  
><br> Another moment, then: "Kizuko can't pilot Unit One."  
><br> "I am painfully aware of that."  
><br> "Will you transfer command to Shinji?"  
><br> "I have little choice in the matter, the angels must be

>defeated. Unit Zero was pretty cheesed about us putting him in there  
in<br>the first place, it won't put up with it again."  
><br> She watched him from the corner of her eye. "Will Shinji?"

><br> "That is none of your concern, Doctor."  
><br> "Would you have me place him as Rei's caretaker?"  
><br> She was rewarded by seeing Gendou wince. `D'oh!` "Uh.. yeah..

>Whatever.. "<br>  
> "... "<br>  
> The comn beeped, Fuyutsuki appearing on a monitor a  
moment<br>later. "The Committee wishes to speak with you, preferably  
as soon as  
>possible."<br>  
> She heard Gendou give a derisive snort. "What do those  
fools<br>want now?"  
><br> Fuyutsuki gave him a weak smile, "Oh, I wouldn't even begin to

>speculate.."<br>  
> "I will be there shortly." as the viewscreen switched off,  
he<br>turned to Ritsuko. "If you would, focus yourself upon Rei, and  
nothing  
>else, Doctor."<br>  
> "Yes, sir."<br>  
> Gendou didn't see her smile as he strode out the door.<br>

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> ^ " ^<br>  
> Shinji turned off the TV with a derisive snort, laying back  
into<br>the soft hospital bed. "Not a word.. on any of it." He  
grumbled, trying  
>to bring himself into focus. He had fought the angel, and won. He  
had<br>brought back Ayanami, alive. He had been deemed a hero.

><br> A hero currently confined in the psych ward, but hero none the

>less.<br>  
> 'We want to run a few tests,' Dr. Akagi had said; 'To make  
sure<br>piloting the Eva hasn't had any detrimental effects on you.'

><br> `Oh, no problems.. just some naked girl threatening to DESTROY

>MY SOUL... Other than that, I'm just Super.` He thought  
bitterly,<br>staring at the unfamiliar ceiling. Listless, he looked  
at everything  
>that wasn't a ceiling.<br>  
> He was lying in the adjustable bed, located in a room  
painted<br>'comfortable white' with two windows to his right. The  
door was six feet  
>to his left. A few monitors next to the bed beeped quietly  
to<br>themselves. The TV was hanging on the wall in front of him, and  
a radio  
>was built into the bed, along with an intercom system. Finally, his  
gaze<br>flicked back up. "Man.. If these ceilings had eyes, they'd be  
pretty  
>bored..."<br>  
> He hit the intercom button.<br>  
> A moment later, a female voice answered. "Yes, Ikari-kun?"<br>  
> "Can you patch me through to Doctor Akagi?"<br>



> "One moment please." said the woman. Shinji waited patiently.<br>

> Ritsuko's voice floated to him over the cheap speakers.

"What's<br>up, Ikari-kun? Feeling ok?"

><br> He smiled, in spite of himself. "Just fine, Doc. Been wondering

>about Ayanami, though.. How is she?"<br>

> "Well, we just got out of the OR half an hour ago. Her arm  
is<br>fixed, and she's feeling better."

><br> "Glad to hear it, Akagi-sensei."

><br> A brief chuckle came over to him. "Please, Ritsuko is fine."

><br> He raised an eyebrow. "Awfully familiar, ain't it?"

><br> Another chuckle. "Oh, just think of it as part of the way I  
show

>my gratitude."<br>

> "For saving the city?"<br>

> "No," She answered, "For saving my daughter."<br>

> Shinji bolted upright, looking at the speaker. "Ayanami's  
your<br>kid?!"

><br> When he didn't hear a response, he checked the intercom. It had

>been turned off from Ritsuko's side. He lay back, staring at  
the<br>ceiling, once again confused. `Dang, I guess that means she's

>unavailable..`<br>

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> Ritsuko smiled as she heard Shinji's cry of disbelief,  
flicking<br>the off button. Yes, he was her personal hero, but that  
didn't mean she

>couldn't tease him.<br>

> She looked to the form of her barely conscious daughter,  
and<br>sighed. Crossing the room to Rei's side, Ritsuko brushed a few  
errant

>hairs back from the girl's eyes. Rei's brow furrowed at the touch,  
her<br>eyes fluttering open. She moaned softly. "s.. shinji..?"

><br> Ritsuko leaned over her daughter, kissing her on the forehead.

>"You wish. No dear, it's me."<br>

> Rei's eyes opened halfway, her crimson gaze still sleepy  
from<br>the sedative. "Mom? what are you-"

><br> Ritsuko shushed her. "Sleep now. We'll talk later," Rei nodded

>weakly as Ritsuko continued. "I have a few things I have to do, but  
I'll<br>be back shortly, ok?" She patted Rei gently on her good  
shoulder as she

>turned to go. "Cheer up, kiddo. You'll be fine."<br>

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> "Mr. Ikari.."<br>

> `Once more into the lion's den..` Gendou sighed inwardly. He  
was<br>behind a holographic desk, seated at the virtual conference  
table of the

>Human Instrumentality Committee. Chairman Keel, and his Committee,  
were<br>not pleased; although they were of no consequence, merely  
reflections of

>Keel: each as nagging and obnoxious as the last.<br>

> "..Surely Nerv and the Eva's can be used more Efficiently?"

Keel<br>continued in his time weathered voice. Fortunately for Gendou, many of  
>the man's facial expressions were hidden behind a visor; effectively<br>saving him from Cthulhu's gaze. "First Unit Zero, and NOW you have  
>wrecked Unit One on her maiden campaign!" The old man grumbled as he<br>flicked on his monitor. "Their repair bills, PLUS the reconstruction of  
>several armored buildings.. Why, It's going to cost as much as a small<br>nation! Luxembourg, to be exact."  
><br> Keel was a little more than 'angry' this time. Gendou was going  
  
>to have to appease him somehow. `Maybe chocolates? That used to work<br>with Yui...`  
><br> The representative from Cagliostro, a spidery man with long hair  
>and an airport for a nose, took his cue with a hauty, nasal voice. "Your<br>Primary obligations are being forgotten.. or is it ignored? While  
>these.. Pet Projects of yours Bankrupt us!"<br>  
> Ikari groaned inwardly. `I know where this is headed..`<br>  
> The American operative, a bulk of a man with chiseled features,<br>leaned forward, openly glaring at Gendou. "Nerv and the Eva's are NOT  
>your only concern!"<br>  
> `My life sucks...`<br>  
> "Well put." Keel said, typing a command into his computer<br>console. A white page with prominent black text appeared, and he  
>swiveled it around for all to see. Not that this was necessary, of<br>course; everyone assembled knew what it said. Human Instrumentality  
>Project, 17th Interim Report, Classified, Eyes Only, Do Not Pass Go,<br>Yadda Yadda. "What about the Instrumentality Project, eh? To us, this  
>project, above all others, represents the greatest hope for these dark<br>times! Where are your priorities?"  
><br> `One of these days, you old buzzard, I'll.. I'll...!` He sighed  
  
>inwardly again. "I Understand."<br>  
> The German proxy, a greasy man with a pronounced widows peak in<br>his oily black hair, snorted in contempt. "Well then. How is the intel  
>op progressing?"<br>  
> "No need for concern. THAT particular manner has already been<br>dealt with." `I'll get you for this, you slimy little..`  
  
><br>[\_]~'\-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> `That's funny..` Shinji thought, sitting in the hospital waiting<br>room for his ride. `No matter how much I think about it, Dr. Akagi still  
>seems too young to have a daughter of 16..` He shook his head,<br>attempting to clear it. It didn't work, but it settled his questions for  
>awhile. He looked to the TV, which was still yapping about 'the<br>unexplained meteor shower' which had damaged several buildings, while  
>-for some inexplicable reason- 'a as yet unknown terrorist faction<br>bombed several buildings during the meteor shower last

night, destroying  
>parts of the downtown office block'.<br>  
> "Geez, that has got to be the WORST attempt at a  
Government<br>misinformation campaign I've ever seen.." he muttered.

><br> The elevators pinged, declaring someone's arrival. Shinji  
turned  
>his attention to it, and froze. It was the only person who's visit  
was<br>even more unpleasant than boredom.. His Father. Shinji turned  
away from  
>him, swearing to himself. Surprisingly, Gendou walked over to  
him.<br>  
> "May I sit down?"<br>  
> "What's your clearance?" Shinji sighed, looking to his father.<br>

> "Ultravio-"<br>  
> "Geez, pop, I was jokin'. Siddown if you must."<br>  
> Gendou took the seat to Shinji's left, visibly slumping into  
it.<br>"Thanks."  
><br> "Yeah yeah."  
><br> "No," the Commander sighed, removing his glasses and rubbing  
the  
>bridge of his nose. "I mean, thank you for defeating the Angel."<br>

> Shinji stiffened, his head slowly turning to his father as  
if<br>his body were made of stone. "Huh..?"  
><br> Gendou chuckled lightly. "Yeah, you really had us going there  
  
>for a second. And thanks.. for saving Ayanami."<br>  
> "Umn... yeah, sure.. you're welcome?"<br>  
> Gendou snorted in amusement. "Indeed."<br>  
> "You know I hate you." Gendou's eyebrow quirked in a  
strange<br>manner as Shinji continued. "Funny thing is, I really  
don't want to hate  
>you.. but you make it so easy!"<br>  
> Gendou blinked. "I.. see. Be that as it may, know that,  
despite<br>all appearances, I am concerned about you."  
><br> "Reeeeeaaaally.."  
><br> "Yes. Really."  
><br> An awkward moment passed between father and son, neither  
knowing  
>what to say. Gendou sighed and slumped deeper into the hospital  
chair.<br>"Bad day, huh?" Shinji asked.  
><br> "Oh, one could say that, and horribly understate the events I  
  
>have gone through since I awoke this morning." Gendou shrugged. "All  
in<br>a days work, though."  
><br> "Hey," Shinji gestured in a comforting manner, "..at least you  
  
>haven't been threatened with the destruction of your soul by a  
naked<br>chick floating in a sea of darkness."  
><br> "Well, not today anyway.. Oh, you're to be transferred as Unit  
  
>One's designated driver as of tomorrow, seeing as Rei is unable  
to<br>pilot."  
><br> "How is she?"  
><br> Gendou inwardly smirked, `Was that a note of worry in his  
  
>voice?` "I have not seen her since before the operation. I have  
heard,<br>however, that she is fine.. and that the operation was a

success. Doctor  
>Akagi is not allowing anyone to see her."<br>  
> "Not even you?"<br>  
> Gendou shook his head. "No, not even me."<br>  
> A holographic window popped up before them, with  
Fuyutsuki<br>inside. "Ikari!  
><br> "Yes?" Father and son replied in unison. Shinji glared at his  
  
>father.<br>  
> "..Oh, so this is the third child?"<br>  
> "Yes," Commander Ikari nodded to Shinji. "Fuyutsuki, this is  
my<br>son, Ikari Shinji. Shinji, meet Fuyutsuki Kozo, my second in  
command."  
><br> "Pleased to meet you." Said the screen.  
><br> "Likewise."  
><br> "Well, Ikari, Final repairs on the Evangelions are being  
  
>completed, and Ritsuko would like to see you about the.. left  
over<br>pieces..  
><br> (Back at the Cage, Ritsuko glared at the large bolt in her  
  
>hands. "Just where the hell does This go, anyway?!")<br>  
> "Nice job on that Angel, Shinji-kun." Fuyutsuki said,  
raising<br>his fist in a 'go get 'em' gesture.  
><br> "Ahh.. Yeah, Anytime."  
><br> "Good! I'm going to take that literally."  
><br> "D'oh!"  
><br> "Tell Doctor Akagi that I am on my way." Gendou said, standing  
  
>up. Several joints popped, and he groaned. "Fuyutsuki."<br>  
> "Sir?"<br>  
> "Schedule me in for a vacation sometime in the  
immediate<br>future."  
><br> "Ye'Sir." The window said before disappearing.  
><br> "Sorry to cut this short, duty calls."  
><br> "I understand."  
><br> "Your ride should be here shortly, and you'll be taken to  
  
>administration for assignment of living quarters."<br>  
> Shinji nodded. Gendou smiled briefly, and then left. Once  
again<br>Shinji was alone.  
><br> It didn't last for long. The sharp 'Tap tap tap' of high heels  
  
>pulled him from his reverie. Misato.<br>  
> "Hi ya, Shinji! Sorry I'm late.. kinda got lost again.  
teehee."<br>He looked the older woman over. She was wearing a yellow  
sleeveless  
>turtleneck and a blue denim skirt. She squirmed under his  
gaze.<br>"What..?"  
><br> "You look very good today. Those colors complement you nicely."  
  
>`Maybe you should be a cub scout den mother?`<br>  
> She blushed slightly. "Oh.. thank you.." Her  
embarrassment<br>turned to anger. "You're not hitting on me, are  
you?!"  
><br> Shinji shrugged. "Could be."  
><br> Misato blinked. That wasn't exactly what she was expecting. She  
  
>decided to drop the subject. "Uh, right. So then, ready to go?"<br>

> He nodded.<br>  
>[\_]~`\'~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza Three: A Silent Tear<br> End

#### 4. Honor's Duty Stanza Four

\*\*\*\*

> Disclaimer: The original Neon Genesis Evangelion belongs  
to<br>Gainax. This particular plot deviation was constructed by me,  
JJ Corley,  
>and has been dubbed an 'Alternate Universe (AU)'. Therefore, the  
term <br>Alternate Universe or AU shall serve as my disclaimer for  
any future  
>posting of this series which lack this disclaimer. Please do not  
<br>sue me, for if you do you'll only get a few bucks and an old  
486DX  
>with a copy of edit.com. What A Prize. I've made my point.<br> \*\*\*\*

><br>Ludicrous Configuration! Productions  
> Presents<br>A Neon Genesis Evangelion Alternate Universe  
> By JJ Corley<br>  
> "What IF God was one of us, eh? You'd be ridin' the subway,  
all<br>honkey-doory, and some bearded dude bumps into ya, and you're  
all like  
>'Hey, watch it pal!' and give 'em the bird. And then, Bamph! You're  
like<br>this pile of ash with eyes as God tips his hat and says  
'Excuse me,  
>asshole'. That would suck!"<br>  
> Evangelion: Honor's Duty<br>  
> Maya looked around. This was her chance. The lab was  
completely<br>void of all personnel, save for herself and Ritsuko.  
Tonight, she could  
>finally ask her beloved Sempai to dinner!<br>  
> Taking a deep, calming breath, she strode forward,  
determination<br>echoing in her wake. "Sempa-"  
><br> "Doctor Akagi."  
><br> Maya eeped and skuttled backwards.  
><br> "Oh, good. You're finally here, Commander Ikari."  
><br> Maya glumly went back to her station as the two began to talk

>about giant bolts, Angel remains, and things that go \*ping\*. She  
began<br>to think dark thoughts.  
><br> `Damn, stupid, jerk Ikari.. always ruining my plans!` She grit

>her teeth and groaned. "Oh, why must the world be such a cold, dark,  
and<br>lonely place? Why? Wh-"  
><br> \*Riiing\*  
><br> Maya blinked at the phone. It responded by ringing at her  
again.  
>Muttering vague curses at, for, and about Gendou, she picked it  
up.<br>"Hello, Nerv, Lab B, sub-section twelve, level 14, box A,  
route fou- oh,  
>hell. What?"<br>  
> "Give. Me. Ritsuko."<br>  
> Maya blinked again. "Captain Katsuragi?"<br>  
> "GIVE. ME. RITSUKO! NOW!"<br>  
> Maya "Yipe!"ed, fell over backwards, and scrambled on all  
fours<br>over to where Gendou and Ritsuko had been absorbed in a few  
things,

>hiding behind the blond doctor and pulling on her lab coat. "Sempai!  
I'm<br>scared!" She pointed at the phone in her hand as her  
commanding officers  
>gave her a blank look. "M-m-misato's mad about something!!"  
she<br>whimpered.  
><br> Ritsuko looked from her watch to the phone, and sighed. "'Bout  
  
>time.." She said as she took the offending object from her  
unnerved<br>assistant. "So, what's wrong, Misato?"  
><br> "YOU! WHAT'S THE BIG IDE-"  
><br> "Shinji will be staying with us, Captain. That's final."

><br> "... " She paused, "..but WHY?"  
><br> In the background, Shinji could be heard saying "{Really, I  
  
>don't mind at all.}"<br>  
> "Quiet, you!"<br>  
> "Misato. We have jobs. We need to be at our jobs to save  
the<br>world. Not to mention earn money for your beer budget, right?"

><br> "Of course! What els-"  
><br> Ritsuko cut in. "When Rei gets out of the hospital, she'll need  
  
>someone to look over her during the day, and we can't ignore  
our<br>responsibilities here! Shinji is the logical choice."  
><br> Misato's voice dropped down a bit. "But, Rei likes him! I can  
  
>tell. What if..?"<br>  
> "They have sex? Do the wild thing? Enjoy themselves a bit?"<br>  
> "Err.. yeah."<br>  
> Ritsuko ignored the glare Gendou was giving her. "As long  
as<br>it's of mutual consent, I don't mind."  
><br> "They're sixteen, for christsakes!"  
><br> Ritsuko sighed again. "They also hold the fate of humanity in  
  
>their hands. The world's continued existence is placed on  
their<br>shoulders. Who are we to tell them not to enjoy themselves  
during what  
>little time we may have left?" After a moment of silence, she  
continued.<br>"Face it captain. One or both of those kids may die  
during these trying  
>times. If they want to find happiness in each others arms, who the  
hell<br>are we to tell them no?"  
><br> "Yeah.. but.."  
><br> "But?"  
><br> "He's hitting on me!"  
><br> Ritsuko began to laugh.  
><br>[\_]~`\-/'~{[\_] Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty  
> ^ " ^ Stanza Four: Livin' La Vida Local.<br>  
> As she closed her cel phone and turned to face a  
rather<br>nonplussed Shinji, Misato bowed slightly. "Err.. Sorry. I  
don't mean  
>that I don't want you with us.."<br>  
> "Funny," He said in a flat tone. "That's what it sounds like."<br>  
  
> "Ah heh heh.. Sorry.."<br>  
> Shinji shrugged. "It's ok. I mean, you just met me twelve  
hours<br>ago, and.. who knows? I may be some kind of peeping tom or  
something."  
><br> "Are you?"

><br> Shinji folded his arms, looking indignantly off to the side.  
"Of  
>course not! I have some honor, you know. I would never spy on  
anyone<br>without them knowing about it."  
><br> Misato, eyebrow raised, Hummed softly to herself. "Izzat  
  
>so?"<br>  
> "However," He continued, "if I make a dissembling remark  
in<br>passing that might be somehow construed as a declaration of  
peeping, and  
>you don't recognize it for what it is, that's your problem, right?  
I<br>meant, I \_am\_ an Ikari. Half-truths and mind games are our  
specialty."  
><br> Misato sweatdropped. "umn.. Glad to hear it. Now, come come, we  
  
>have stuff to buy for the party and we need to get you settled in."  
She<br>said, going around him and pushing from behind.  
><br> "I can walk, you know."  
><br> "But you look so statuesque!"  
><br>[\_]~`\'-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "What am I supposed to do..? How do I handle this..? I'm  
his<br>mom, but at the same time, I'm not!"  
><br> "..."  
><br> "It's just so confusing! I love him, but what can I do about  
it?  
>Isn't being with him, when it's me, like incest?"<br>  
> "..."<br>  
> "I mean, it might not come to it, but.. if I'm around him  
too<br>much.. you know, I may just.." she blushed, "And he may  
just.."  
><br> "..."  
><br> "..are you even listening to me?" Rei asked of her guest.  
  
><br> "..yes." came the emotionless reply.  
><br> Rei shuddered and leaned back into the hospital bed, her gaze  
  
>traveling from her guest, who was no better off than she was in  
physical<br>condition, to the bedside table, and the small white  
flower the other  
>girl had brought with her. "Thank you.. for the rose.. and  
for<br>listening.. I feel better now."  
><br> Her guest got to her feet, and strode quickly and silently  
  
>towards the door. She opened it with the hand not in a sling,  
stepped<br>through, and stopped -turning her bandaged head slightly.  
"If you wish  
>to be with him, then do so. Current standings belie any  
moral<br>assumptions you have on this matter.." She paused, turning  
to look at  
>Rei once more with a single crimson eye. "Do what makes you  
happy."<br>  
> "Kizuko.. I'll try."<br>  
> Kizuko Ayanami, the second Rei, nodded once and closed the  
door.<br>  
>[\_]~`\'-/'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> \*Skreeeeeeeeeeee-Kerplunk!\*<br>  
> Yet another 90 degree parking job courtesy of Misato.  
Shinji,<br>who had yet to get used to such things, pulled his body

from the door  
>and attempted to get out of the car. The door opened slightly,  
then<br>stopped.  
><br> "Misato?"  
><br> The older woman, who was already out and grabbing groceries,  
  
>stopped and looked over the trunk at him. "Yeah?"<br>  
> "Too close to the wall."<br>  
> She winced. "Oops, sorry. Ritsuko has her own car and I  
don't<br>ride with passengers much."  
><br> "I can tell.." Shinji said as he crawled through the driver's  
  
>side and to freedom. Car + Misato = Speedy 4-Wheeled Coffin.<br>  
> Shinji looked around himself. It was a nice high-rise  
apartment<br>complex, with the rooms built around an open rectangular  
courtyard, a  
>skylight twelve stories above. Each floor had 24 apartments, with a  
half<br>wall and guard rail on the upper level corridors. The  
courtyard had been  
>arranged so that it was part garden, part parking, and part snack  
shack.<br>  
> "Shinji.." He turned to look at Misato. "Heads up!"<br>  
> One, two, three grocery bags were caught and he looked at  
her<br>blankly. "You could have asked me to carry them instead of  
throwing them  
>at me, you know."<br>  
> "Just testing your reflexes."<br>  
> He sighed, looking inside the bags he carried to the  
food<br>within. "And now I suppose you want to test my culinary  
skills, as well?"  
><br> The trunk clicked shut and Misato walked towards the apartment  
  
>complex, another three bags in her arms and Shinji in tow.  
"Well,<br>Ritsuko and I have an agreement.. she cooks and I clean.  
But, I'm sure  
>that if you want to fix dinner, she wouldn't mind." She stopped  
and<br>pressed the call button for the elevator, and it pinged open  
instantly.  
>She stepped inside.<br>  
> And waited. "Arn't you getting on?"<br>  
> Shinji gave the elevator a dubious look. "I've been in one  
too<br>many metal boxes today. There's some stairs over there. What  
floor?"  
><br> "Are you sure you want to do that, Shinji?"  
><br> "Yes. What floor."  
><br> "Tenth."  
><br> Shinji looked to the stairs. `Uh uh.. no way am I walking up  
  
>that many stairs.` He looked to the inside corner, and followed it  
with<br>his eyes up to the tenth floor, nodding. `I'll do it the fun  
way, then.`  
>He placed the bags into the elevator and smiled. "See you at the  
top."<br>  
> Misato sighed. "Well.. don't be too long about it.. I'm  
not<br>going to wait forever, you know. Apartment nine twenty two.."  
  
><br> Shinji nodded again, waiving as the doors closed on Misato. He  
  
>then ran for the corner, and leapt straight up, landing on the 2nd  
floor<br>railing, startling an elderly gentleman sitting across from



it. Before  
>the old man could say anything, Shinji was gone, having jumped to  
the<br>third.  
><br>[\_]~`\'-/\'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> Ritsuko was about to swipe her key card through the reader  
and<br>unlock the front door when two things happened. One, the  
elevator gave a  
>pleasant \*Bing\*! as it opened, revealing Misato. Two, and  
more<br>surprising, Shinji suddenly landed on the guard rail directly  
across  
>from her. She watched him pause, then hop down and walk towards  
the<br>elevator, grabbing a handful of bags.  
><br> "Damn, you beat me," He said.  
><br> Ritsuko calmly walked over to the railing and looked down,  
  
>meeting the unbelieving stares of those who were looking up after  
the<br>young martial artist's passing. Misato did the same.  
><br> Shinji joined them a moment later. "Oi, whatcha lookin' at?  
  
>Oh.." He gave a sheepish grin to those below. "Err.. Sorry 'bout  
that.."<br>  
> "Shinji.. You didn't.. jump up here, did you?" Asked Misato in  
a<br>small voice.  
><br> "Not from ground, no. Had to do it diagonally from floor to  
  
>floor, see.. I could have gotten here in one leap, if you lived on  
the<br>second or third floor, but.. err.." He stopped as both women  
gave him an  
>odd look. "What?"<br>  
> "Nothing. I need to sit down.." Ritsuko said, shaking her  
head,<br>while Misato opted for a more conventional saying.  
><br> "I need a beer..  
><br>[\_]~`\'-/\'~{[\_]  
> ^ " ^<br>  
> "So then.. this is our Enemy.." Fuyutsuki said in awe.<br>  
> Gendou poked it with a stick. "Not so tough now, are  
you,<br>Sachiel?"  
><br> The Angel, being quite dead, couldn't tell Gendou to bugger  
off.  
><br> "You there!" Fuyutsuki called to the tech crew above them. "How  
  
>goes the removal of the core?"<br>  
> "Almos-" \*ClunK\* "Ok.. we are done."<br>  
> The large platform descended, and the techs made room for  
the<br>Commander and Sub-Commander. Gendou removed his gloves,  
pressing his  
>scarred hands against the warm, slick surface of the S2  
organ.<br>"Excellent.. It is in almost perfect condition..  
><br> "Yes, save for the minimal amount of degradation due to the  
host  
>being deceased." Fuyutsuki agreed. He turned to one of the techs.  
"Is it<br>still active?"  
><br> "As near as we can tell, with the equipment and knowledge we  
  
>have.." she said, holding up a voltmeter and pressing the probes to  
the<br>S2 organ, "No sir, it is not. It seems to have gone into a  
type of..  
>stand-by mode, we think. No radiation or gasses are being released..  
and<br>it's currently thirty two degrees Celsius, with a water

content of 80%."

>She gave it a look. "If it had stripes, I'd say it was a big<br>watermelon."

><br> "And you can tell all that by using a voltmeter?"

><br> She nodded. "It can even project an approximate hair loss ratio

>due to stress and genetics. Wonder of modern technology, ain't it, sir?"<br>

> Fuyutsuki was sorely tempted to use it on his head, but was<br>saved by his master's call. "Yes'sir?"

><br> "Contact the third Nerv branch in the US.. and tell them to

>expect a delivery."<br>

> "The third, sir..? Why not the second, in Germany? Some of our<br>top researchers are there. Or, why not just examine it here?"

><br> "I am more concerned with what SEELE would do if they had access

>to research derived from this."<br>

> (Somewhere in Germany, a certain Kaji Ryouji sneezed. Keel<br>handed him a Kleenex. "Gezunhiet. Now, what was that about Unit One's

>pilot?")<br>

> Fuyutsuki nodded. "Probably dance a jig."<br>

> "Indeed. A merry Irish jig, over our graves." Gendou slid his<br>glasses back up. "A condition neither of us want."

><br> "Uh huh. But the Committee has spies in Nerv-Three as well."

><br> "Yes, but they are American. And what do Americans do with

>important information..?"<br>

> Fuyutsuki chuckled. "Blackmail you and keep quiet if you pay."<br>

> "Exactly." He nodded to the techs as he pulled his gloves back<br>on. "Box it up."

><br> The two turned and headed out of the containment bay.

><br> "Gendou equals Genius."

><br> "Why, thank you."

><br>[\_}~`\-/'~{[\_]

> ^ " ^<br>

> Shinji blinked. "It's a penguin."<br>

> Ritsuko had slumped into an overstuffed chair in the corner next<br>to the TV, while Misato had hit the left fridge and gotten a beer before

>plopping down on the spacious sofa. Shinji, after noticing the general<br>lack of room in the left fridge (50 gallons of beer?! I bet she likes

>shrimp too..), had asked about the right one. Enter Pen-Pen.<br>

> "Ya!" Misato smiled, pulling the can of Yebisu from her lips to<br>speak, "He's an ex.. extremely rare, brand new hot-spas penguin!"

>Ritsuko gave her a look, which Shinji missed. "His name's Pen-Pen, play<br>nice now."

><br> "Wark!"

><br> "Nice to meet you too.." Shinji shook his head, placing the bags

>on the kitchen counter. Soon after, sounds of a meal being prepared<br>wafted through the house. Ritsuko sighed.

><br> "This is nice.. a meal being made -and for once, I'm not the one

>making it." The blonde scientist looked to the kitchen, and seeing<br>Shinji was out of hearing, leaned towards Misato, "Nice save.. Why  
>didn't you tell him the truth?" She whispered to her.<br>  
> Misato snorted into her beer, giving her roommate an odd look.<br>"An jus what am I suppos' ta say?" Came the muffled reply, "Oi, Shin-  
>chan, our pet is an ex-science experiment turned lab rat who was drugged<br>and thrown in a garbage can before I saved his sorry ass?"

><br> By her side, Pen-Pen gave an indignant squawk and waddled back  
into his fridge.<br>  
> "I'd hoped you could have put it in a slightly more tactful<br>manner, but.. more or less."  
><br> From the kitchen, amidst the periodic \*Chopchopchop\*ing,

>Shinji's voice floated to them. "It doesn't matter to me where you got<br>him, having a penguin as a pet is kinda cool. Sorry to hear about his  
>past, though."<br>  
> "You heard that?" Ritsuko had to laugh at the look of complete<br>disbelief plastered on Misato's face.  
><br> A sharp hiss of a hot pan meeting cold food flared, followed by

>"Of course I heard you." Then, "Hey, Ritsuko.. how's Rei?"<br>  
> "super hearing or something.." Misato muttered as her friend<br>took over the conversation.  
><br> "Quite fine, she'll be home within the next few days. I think

>Kizuko visited her this afternoon."<br>  
> "Kizuko? Who's that?"<br>  
> "The designated pilot of Unit Zero." Ritsuko answered.<br>  
> All sounds of meal preparation stopped. Shinji came out of the<br>kitchen, a Wok in one hand, a spoon in the other, and a disgruntled air  
>about him. "...the.. what?"<br>  
> Ritsuko, with a puzzled expression, repeated herself.  
"Unit<br>Zero's pilot."  
><br> "She doesn't happen to bear a strong resemblance to Rei, does

>she?"<br>  
> "They're sisters.." Misato told him, followed by a soft "more or<br>less.." That Shinji didn't hear.  
><br> The young man turned to Ritsuko, "You have TWO kids?!"  
><br> "Err.. no.. I adopted Rei, Kizuko is your father's

>responsibility.."<br>  
> "Ade.. Ado.." Shinji breathed a sigh of relief, causing both<br>adults to look at him oddly. "Adopted! Heh, that's why you seemed young,  
>Ritsu.. You are available after all.."<br>  
> "..."<br>  
> "What?" He said, shifting uncomfortably under the older woman's<br>gaze.  
><br> "I think you're a bit young for me, Shin-Chan." She said,

>stressing the 'chan'. Shinji sighed, and went back to finish dinner,<br>grumbling something about age and perceptions about women and not being

>a kid. Misato groaned.<br>  
> "And I thought he was only going to hit on me!"<br>  
> Ritsuko began to laugh again as a disgruntled "I am now!"  
came<br>from the kitchen; followed closely by Misato's angry "Treat  
me like  
>second best, will you?" as she went after Shinji.<br>  
> `Things can only get stranger` Ritsuko mused as sounds of  
pain<br>wafted out to her.

## 5. Honor's Duty Chapter Five

Ludicrous Configuration! Productions Presents A Neon Genesis  
Evangelion Alternate Universe By JJ Corley

'Its 10:00 PM. Do you know where your double agents are? Even as I  
speak, they could be pilfering the personnel files, or stealing  
security passes, or maybe even laundering money and leaving you  
hanging out to dry.'

SneakSneak

"Und dann hat sie gesagt, 'Oh, so hat mir noch niemand die Zunge  
rausgestreckt. Aber hier ist zu viel los, kommst du nachher auf mein  
Zimmer?'"

SneakSneak

"Heh. Und was ist mit deiner Frau?"

"Was soll mit meiner Frau sein? Die war in Zrich. Die hat doch keine  
Ahnung."

SneakSneak

"Ganz schn durchtrieben, Mann. Wirklich cool. Real  
Smooth."

SneakSneakBRIIING!

"Hey, hast du was gehrt? Was war das?"

"Hm? War das ein Telefon?"

Once again, Ryouji Kaji found himself in a particularly tight  
situation. Being where you generally weren't supposed to was easy for  
him; trying to be as silent as a ninja and sneak past security  
guards, while having a cell phone ringing in his pocket,  
wasn't.

"shit.."

Cursing softly, he pulled the evil device from his pocket and killed  
the shrill noise by turning it on. "what?" he snarled as vehemently  
as he could, given his present circumstances -IE, Nerv-Germany's  
Central Dogma, twenty or so levels below that which his security  
clearance allowed.

"Schnell! Ruf ein Sicherheitsteam!"

"Wir SIND das Sicherheitsteam!"

"Bist du dir da sicher?"

"Do you have it yet?"

Kaji ducked behind a corner just as a guard appeared from the opposite direction, the automatic rifle normally about the man's shoulders now in his hands.

"look, Gendou.. this is NOT a good time."

"That is irrelevant. Do you have the objective?"

Kaji rolled his eyes and his body to the left, ducking into a large office as the guard came nearer. "No, I don't."

"When will you?"

Kaji eyed the filing cabinets before him warily, as if they were rabid beasts. "If you bugger off and let me work? Maybe twenty minutes. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm hanging up before the guard sees me and decides that I'm not supposed to be here -which, of course, I'm NOT. Tell me again why I'm doing this?" He dropped his voice lower as a sharp Taptaptaping began to echo about him. "And make it quick!"

"As I told you during your mission briefing, we need to gain possession of Unit Two and retrieve Adam; Seele is the only organization who possesses information on its whereabouts -and you, currently, are the only one who can get it for me."

"Yeah? Well, if Seele has it, why am I running around this blonde fraulin?" God save me from bureaucratic fools..

"Nerv-G is almost exclusively staffed with Seele compromised personnel, which is how I want it. Easier to get the information you want if your enemy is willing to give it to you, if only to keep up appearances. Oh, that and Adam may possibly be housed in the Nerv-G facility as well."

"..uh huh.. Well, Ta Ta dearie. Mr. Smith's here." He jabbed the off button, removed the battery, and hurled the cellular across the hall and into an elevator; the phone somehow managing to ricochet off the interior and hit the 'up' button. Kaji smiled. "Yes! Score one for our hero."

"Schnell, da hinten!"

Both guards, hearing the friendly Bing, ran to the elevator, only to watch it ascend without them. Swearing, the young men dashed for the only other elevator on this level, which happened to be clear across the complex.

That suited Kaji just fine...

\-/' Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty " Stanza Five: Cardiac Arrested

One foot after the other.. Maya thought, not walking as much as

sulking back to her small apartment within the Geofront. C'mon, damn it.. this isn't too bad.. I've lost the chance to talk to Ritsu before... She clenched her teeth and her fists, beginning to growl slightly, But.. Damn! I was so close this time! I coulda talked to her, I know it! If only..

"..if only that damn fool of an idiot Ikari hadn't come in right then.. I'd've.. I'd've.." She sighed, finding herself in front of her door. She pulled her keys from her pocket and unlocked it, stepping through, her anger at Ikari dissipating as the door behind her closed and locked again with a loud Click. I'd've been out with Ritsu.. and not here.. alone.. She slid down the hard steel surface of the door until she was sitting in the foyer, her arms wrapped around her knees, crying softly.

".. not here.. alone.. again.." She managed between sobs.

After several long, tear filled moments she calmed herself, standing shakily, and looked at the mirror across from her; the tired, downcast, heartbroken soul that stared back almost caused her to break down again. She took a few tentative steps closer, wiping her eyes on the long sleeves of her uniform. "C'mon, Ibuki!" She said softly, her lips trembling, "There's always tomorrow. And then the day after.. and the one after that.. and -I'm so pathetic."

She slumped forward, her forehead pressing against the cool reflective surface of the mirror, both she and her double crying softly. She took a deep, shuddering breath and forced herself to stop. She slowly opened her eyes, looking at the table she kept in front of the mirror.

Which, oddly enough, had a book on it.

Maya, being a romance novel junkie, owned several hundred especially cheesy volumes in her collection (Which she normally kept out of sight in the sturdy cedar box under her television). This happened to be one of the Limburger order. It should also be noted that it looked well used. With one final sniff, she scooped the book into her arms, meaning to place it out of sight with its sisters; regardless, curiosity overcame her on the way, and she opened the book to the marker.

\\ "Oh, Louise .. Hold me!" Sheridan cried softly, embracing the object of her desire. "Just for a moment.. I feel so safe in your arms." \\

\\ Louise lightly stroked Sheridan's luxurious, yet boyishly short mane of blonde hair affectionately as he whispered to her, "Sheridan, my darling, I would do anything for you.." \\

\\ "Oh, Hank! I am so glad you called.." \\

\\ "HANK?" \\

Thump

The book met the floor as Maya slowly raised her numb hands to her cheeks, looking forlornly at the telephone. "'So glad you called'.." she quoted.

If the book, entitled 'Passions', had half the brain Louise might have had before taking so many steroids, it would have noted that this was the one hundred and sixty first time this same scenario had replayed itself over the exact same number of days.

"..no, I.. I couldn't just call her.. I mean, what would I say? What would she say? Ouuooo.. it'd be so embarrassing!"

Tune in tomorrow, same bat time, same bat channel, ne? Fortunately for our sanity, no.

As embarrassing as tugging on Ritsuko's labcoat like a small child because you were scared of Captain Katsuragi's tone of voice? some small, possibly annoyed, romance novel hating portion of her psyche responded. Just call 'er, least she can do is not talk to you, ya?

Maya's lower lip began to tremble softly as she stepped ever closer to the phone. "b-bu-b-but.. I don't know her number!"

If the voice in her head could sweat drop, it would have been doing so while cursing. Use the phonebook, ya moron!

"oh.."

\-/'

> The worst part of Shinji's day hadn't been fighting the Angel.. Oh no. The worst part wasn't even when Misato had beaten him soundly over the head with a hot Wok.<p>

No, the worst part of his day was when Misato and Ritsuko had both lugged the keg out of his soon to be bedroom.. and then decided that the promptest way of disposing of it was through consumption.

"After all, what's a party without beer?" Misato had argued.

He was currently sandwiched somewhere in between the two women, a position he had been desiring not four hours ago, and which they had wanted no part in. But if Shinji had one rule when it came to women, it was never to do anything with one that was drunk; it spoils the fun. He had found it fairly easy to uphold that rule, being one to avoid alcohol and the type of people who consumed mass quantities of it, until now. Misa and Ritsu, on the other hand, were a wee bit harder to avoid.

Shinji sighed, slumping in the group embrace as the women broke into another drinking song, and contemplated his glass of water. Why he was drinking water is simply an act of genius: it's hard to spike water with beer. Alas, it was also his fifteenth glass this evening, the previous 14 having fallen pray to beer contamination; and since Misato had opened a bottle of Sake not ten minutes ago, he feared his current glass was spiked as well. I'm not even gonna touch it..

"Gwaaaaa!"

Misato had wrapped her arm around his neck while he was thinking, and proceeded to give him a nudge. "Innut'is fun!"

"Hey! Oww, damnit! Lemme go! That hurts!" She did so, laughing at

him. He growled softly. "Oh, yess.. FUN. Sittin' here, crammed between two beautiful women-"

"Waaaaarrkk!" Pen-Pen warked indignantly, then took another long pull from his Yebisu.

"-... Okay, Two women and a Penguin who are all thoroughly smashed and outrank me."

"Pen-Pen outranks you?"

Ritsuko 'Sig Hail'ed the floundering fowl. "Mein Fuhrer! Leader of the Avian race!"

Pen-Pen returned it, the motion upsetting his balance. He fell backwards with a loud Clang and a surprised "WarK!". The good doctor found this amusing.

Shinji elbowed Ritsuko in the ribs, albeit gently, while Misato set about righting the penguin. "Not funny."

Misato straightened the bird out, raised his arms, and adjusted the angle of his head slightly. She then let go. Pen-Pen pin-wheeled his arms for a brief moment before Clanking to the floor again. Misato shrugged, and set about removing his back-pack unit. "Me thinks the bird is too tipsy to wear this right now."

She handed it to Shinji. "Hold this."

"Eh? Umn, sure." He watched as she propped the bird up next to the table. This time, he stayed up. "What is this thing, anyway?" Ritsuko's arm went around his neck as she leaned in closer, and he could smell the alcohol on her breath.

"It's a really cool toy. A Personal Jet Ski, yeah! Those little holes on top are the intake nozzles, and the back has the propeller and exhaust vents. Solar powered, battery has a life of twelve hours in use, and cost twenty two thousand yen to build."

"So.." he said, "Dropping it would be a bad thing."

Ritsuko shrugged, pulling away. "It's fairly impact resistant, has to be, 'cause he falls on it all the time."

"But he's a penguin, why's he need a jet ski?"

"Something they did to him in the test labs.." Misato said softly, "..screwed him up, big time. He can swim, but not too good any more; so we convinced the guy's down in R&D to build that for him. It's got a built in ballast and a heater, too."

"Ah. Explains the Nerv logo on the underside."

Pen-pen looked to Misato and squeaked.

"Ok, okay. But if you fall over, it's your fault." She said, snatching the jet ski from Shinji and attempting to get it back on.

Ritsuko shook her head and reached for another beer. Shinji placed



his hand on hers, effectively stopping her. She looked to him quizzically.

"You do realize you have work tomorrow morning, right?"

"Nerv's regulations state that in the event of an angel attack, all staff on duty during said attack have the following day as leave, in hopes of keeping stress low and moral high." She said, smiling. "So, no work tomorrow Shin-chan."

"Ah, that's why you're getting so drunk. And here I thought you were just celebrating my win."

"Awww, nah. THAT was a given!" Misato said, blinking at the clasps to Pen-Pen's jet ski. "Why are there FOUR of these things?"

".. So then there're backup personnel, right?" Shinji said to Ritsuko.

"Of course! ..unless it's Saturday tomorrow-"

"It is." Misato supplied.

"-'cause then they have the day off too. It is..?" Ritsuko turned her eyes skyward, letting the gears turn. "Then.."

"Then..?" Shinji said softly, beginning to feel an odd sense of dread fall over him.

"Then Third shift should show up and take over.. But they haven't been hired yet 'cause the Personnel Department's been dragging their asses. Misato, Call HQ and tell Second Shift to keep working?"

"Can't. It's twenty after twelve."

Shinji looked to Misato, who leaned on him heavily; taking a brake and reaching for another bottle of Sake. "Why..? Don't tell me they get off at.."

"Midnight?" She finished for him, smiling. "Uh huh, they do."

His head spun back to Ritsuko fast enough to generate a small breeze. "Then who's watchin' for the Angels?"

"The Magi'll monitor the sensors.. no worries. If they spot something, their proggied to call me up on my phone.." She pointed to a phone across the room which was covered in various cat-shaped stickers, "Over there."

Shinji blinked. The phone rang. Shinji sweat-dropped.

Ritsuko adopted the look of 'cute-yet-thoroughly-surprised'. "Hot damn. I knew it, my hands are cursed. I should never point at anything ever again. Never. Eyourg" Using the table as a boost, she stood up and blearily walked over to the phone. "Moshi-Moshi?"

Shinji had exactly two seconds of terror as Dr. Akagi's expression changed from one of cheerful drunkenness to professionalism. Then..

"..No, I do not want to change my long distance carrier."  
Click.

Shinji relaxed, breathing a sigh of relief. The phone rang again.

'\-/'

> Maya almost dropped the phone when she heard Dr. Akagi's voice.  
"Moshi-Moshi?"<p>

"A.. a.. ano.. G-g-g-good E-evening, Sempai.."

"Maya, that you?"

Maya thought she could hear a gasp of terror from somewhere in the background, but couldn't be sure. "H-hai.." She said, nervously twining her fingers in the phone cord. "Yes, it.. it's me."

"What's up, something wrong? You've never called me at home before.."

She panicked. "Oh, nonononono! Nothing wrong, I just.. umn, just wanted to chat? Yes.." She took a calming breath. "Yes, Chat. Hehe.."

"Oh, sure, hang on a sec.." then a muffled, "Shinji! You can breathe now, She's only called to talk."

"Damnit! What'cha tryin' ta do, kill me? Don't look so serious!"

Maya blinked. So that's where the Commander's son had gotten off to.  
"Ikari-kun is over there? Why?"

"He saved our asses and my daughter's life, Maya. I think I'm kinda indebted to him, a bit.."

She nodded. "Oh, yeah.."

"Hey! Shinji! Come over here and help me get this strap on Pen-Pen, would ya? I'm having a hell of a time!"

"What? Misato! You've got it on him backwards! Move, will you?"

"Oh, geeze. Will you two cut it out, I'm on the phone!"

Maya blinked. "Umn, Sempai? What's going on over there?"

"Huh? Oh. Well, it's like this -Hey!"

"WarK!"

"Get back here you little runt! Shinji, grab him!"

"Hey! Get out from between my legs, Pen-Pen, I'm gonna fall! Misato, can't you keep him busy?"

"How? Strip and bounce?"

"Now that would be interesting.."

"Waaark!"

"Eugh! Don't wave that thing at me, you littl-!"

"Ha! Got you! Shinji, put it on him now!"

"Umn.. How exactly does this thing strap on?" There was a pause.  
"Damn, I just can't seem to get it on Pen-Pen just right.."

"Just a second and I'll help you with it.. I think you have it positioned wrong."

Maya's mouth felt dry. "Ano.. I'll call back. Later." MUCH Later.

"Huh? Maya? Wait, it's o-" Click

Maya looked at the phone. She had done the impossible. She had hung up on her Sempai! "But just what in the hell are they doing over there?"

A moment of pure silence settled over her, broken only by the keen whaling of a passing car-train.

"Note to self: When you go on your dinner date with Ritsuko, make sure the restaurant serves liquor.."

'\-/'

> Ritsuko blinked at the phone, then placed it back on its cradle.  
"Damn, you two scared her off. Now, hand me the bird."<p>

Misato gingerly passed the struggling penguin to Ritsu, and Shinji handed her the jet ski. A few snaps later, and it was in place. "Not too hard, was it?"

Misato waved her off, heading towards the table and a beer. "Yeah, yeah.."

She knelt and let the frustrated Pen-Pen go, and he quickly waddled back to his beer. He picked it up and moved clear across the room, settling down with a ruffled squawk. "You think he's upset?" Shinji asked. Ritsuko just shrugged.

The phone rang again. "Today is just not my day." Ritsu sighed, picking up the receiver. "Moshi-Moshi..? Haaaa!"

Shinji's head snapped quickly over to the doctor, terror revisited as Ritsuko's beautiful face tightened in concern. Then.. "I'm so sorry you're lonely, sweetheart. I'll be sure to visit you tomorrow.. umn, afternoon. Wha..? No, I'm not Drunk! Well, not that drunk. Maybe a little.." He exhaled all the tension he had built up as Ritsu laughed nervously. "Ok, ok.. umn, say.. would you like to talk to Shinji?"

Said boy made the universal 'Who, me?' gesture. Ritsu smiled and wagged the phone at him. Misato giggled slightly and tossed an empty beer can at his head. He caught it. "Go get 'er, lover-boi!"

"Mou.." he complained, crumpling the can and tossing it into the

large pile with its brothers. He took the phone from the smiling doctor and grimaced slightly before speaking. "Umn.. Moshi-Moshi?"

A soft, tired "Hi." answered, followed by a short laugh. "Sorry, but you sound scared."

"I am." He grumped. "Your mom said that there's no one at Command till Sunday, 'Cause they got tomorrow off, and Second shift's got it off.."

A small peal of laughter came through the handset. "..and Third shift hasn't been hired yet. Well, Hospital staff is here, I'm here.. If an Angel attacks, you'll save me again.. won't you?"

"Re-.. Ayanami, I.. Of course I would."

"Mnnmm.. You can call me Rei, you know.. And I know you'd save me, you're that kind of guy, ne?"

He blew out a puff of air as he leaned against the wall. "I try to be. How ya feeling? You doing ok?"

"Yeah, a bit better. My arm feels fuzzy, like it's there, but not. It's.. odd, really. Mom says it'll go away after a while, so I guess it's okay."

"Yeah?" He said, not knowing how to sympathize with that. "Er.. Your ma seems to know what she's doin'.. most of the time." Ritsuko 'Duh'ed him upside the back of the head. "Gaa! Hey! Watch the hair!"

He heard Rei suppress a giggle. "Now that you had coming. Don't you go talkin' smack 'bout my ma, foo."

"Err.. Right."

"Hey, Umn.. Shinji-kun, I gotta go. Head nurse is staring at me."

"Ok, Umn, Sleep well Rei. I'll come by and visit ya tomorro-"

"Nope, nuh uh, no way, BuzzzzzzT" Misato said, tossing yet another Yebisu can at the pile of empties and missing terribly, knocking Pen-Pen in the noggin instead.

"Warrrrrrk!"

"Umn, Sorry."

"I can't see Rei? Why not?"

"'Cause you gots school, bub." Ikari looked from the purple haired one to the blonde haired one, but both women were nodding. He sighed in resignation.

"..Okaaayy.. Scratch that, I'll see ya 'round noonish, then."

"Why?" Ayanami asked.

"Looks like I have school. Joy upon joy."

"Ah, it isn't that bad. Kurasawa-sensei'll bore you to tears, though. He always talks about the second impact on Saturdays. Eeep! Umn, now I really have to go. Later Shinji!"

"Yeah, later."

After hanging up, he leveled both women with a glare. "Who's idea was it to send me to school when I did all the hard work yesterday and both of you get the day off tomorrow?"

"Your father's." came the reply, in stereo.

Shinji deflated. "Mooooouu... damn it." He closed his eyes, shook his head, then headed for his room. "Would one of you be so kind as to wake me tomorrow morning?"

"Not a chance."

"That we'd be kind," Asked Ritsuko, "Or that we'll even see morning..?"

"Both.." Misato replied, eyeing her beer can before tossing it away and grabbing a fresh one.

"Mnnmm.. I suppose you're right."

Shinji's eyebrow twitched. "Good Night Ladies."

"Night."

"Night!"

"Warrk!"

The eyebrow twitched again as he slid his door shut. Luckily, his travel bag had arrived at the apartment while he was in the hospital. He opened it, rummaged a bit, and retrieved his alarm clock. After plugging it into the wall, he set the time and the alarm, then adjusted the volume to 'Raise the Dead' and flopped into the futon.

"This is ridiculous.."

'\-/'

>"Class.. We have a new student." The elderly sensei, Kurasawa Mijimou, said as he pushed up his glasses. "Ikari-kun, would you please introduce yourself..?"<p>

Shinji, dressed in a standard boys school uniform, gave the older man a curt nod in affirmation. After scrawling his name across the chalkboard in hideously lazy Kanji, he turned to face the class. "I'm Ikari Shinji. I'm a second year student, transferred here from Kobe." He did a quick bow, then yawned. "And I'm tired. Where do I sit?"

Sensei looked a bit miffed at being treated so badly, but pointed him in the right direction. "Behind Kanazaki-san. Kanazaki, raise your hand please?"

And so, the drudgery started. Until noon.

"..and so, the great civilization of man, that had take-"

Slide The door slid open, cutting the old man off. Shinji paused in mid yawn, and almost yelled in surprise. "R-!"

"Ayanami Kizuko!" Shouted the class rep, a girl with brown hair and the name of Hikari. Shinji found the name easy to remember because of the similarity to his. "You're late! This is the second time this week you've interrupted class before lunch break! Why can't you just come in after lunch is over!"

"Miss Hikari! That will be enough. Ayanami, please take your seat."

"Yes, sir." The wounded girl replied.

So that's Rei's sister.. Shinji thought, looking her over, a wolfish smile tugging at his lips. "What a babe.."

The girl seated in front of him turned a bit, nodding. "Yeah, I thought so too, but she's as cold as ice. Not that I wouldn't mind helping her undress anyway.. Her sister on the other hand-" Her eyes went hazy and she sighed, slumping in her seat a little, her hands clasped under her chin. She squealed in delight. "Now there's a babe!"

Shinji idly caught the chalk eraser after it bounced off her head. "Kanazaki! Be quiet!"

"Cough Cough! Yes, sir!"

"Humnn..." He said, watching Kizuko weave her way to her desk, tossing the eraser in the air and catching it again a few times. As she sat, her single crimson eye locked with his, and an electric trill went up his spine, causing him to drop the eraser. Oh hoo..

Lunch break couldn't come too soon for him.

'\-/'

>"So.. you're Rei's sister, huh?"<p>

She turned halfway from her place at the roof's railing to look at him. "And you are Commander Ikari's son, correct?"

"It would appear so." He said, joining her, looking out over the school grounds. The students milled about, eating, talking with friends, and playing as high school students will. He could feel her looking at him, as if she were trying to measure his worth. He ignored it and enjoyed the view.

At length, she spoke. "Granted."

Startled by the quiet girl, he turned to look at her. "What?"

"You may use Unit Zero." she said, looking over the schoolyard once more.

"Oh. Umn, Thanks. Always good to know your soul won't be destroyed while you fight to save the world in a piece of ornery equipment.." He deadpanned.

She failed to smile; she just nodded.

Shinji's eyebrow twitched. "eeeehhh.. yeah. So, how long have you been in on this project?"

"Seven years."

"That so?" His voice lifted, carrying the note of the genuinely interested. "I guess my father was getting prepared. Like a Chef! He's got all the ingredients ready to serve us up a nice big slice of disaster pie.." He snorted. "Feh. What a good analogy I made."

"..." She continued to watch the world as it went by.

"Not funny?" he asked, leaning his back against the rail.

"..?" He attracted her gaze for a second, before it turned elsewhere.

He waited for her to say something, anything, simply watching her. She didn't seem to mind.

After an hour, Shinji felt fairly convinced he could draw her portrait blindfolded.

"Kizuko," he said a moment later, observing her from the corner of his eye, ".. from this day on, I swear I'll be doing everything in my power to make you laugh."

"...?" She took a step back from the railing, looking at him curiously. "Why?"

"Its just Joy. Purely. You'll feel like a Neuman! Err, woman."

"I do not understand.." She said, cocking her head at a slight angle.

"It's a joke."

"A Joke?" She paused, looking down. "Ah, a grouping of words into a structure designed to elicit humor from another and promote happiness." She looked up at him again, tilting her head to the other side with a cute expression of puzzlement written there. "You wish to promote happiness within me?"

He blinked. "Err.. yeah. That's one way of puttin' it."

"Why?"

"Why not?" Shrugging, he stuffed his hands in his pockets. "It's what I do. Makes me happy to make others happy, you know?"

"No."

He shook his head. "That's sad, really." He took a dramatic pose as

he continued, "But, worry not your pretty little head! You'll learn happiness if I have to write it into your Eva's basic programming!"

"Altering the Evangelion's BeOS Parameters is punishable by death." She said in a complete monotone.

A bit of spark left his pose. "BeOS! So, if I install Windows2ndImpact, I'm a dead man?"

She blinked.

"..." he picked his flair up again with gusto. "Then death it will be, if it comes to that." He bowed to her, then headed for the stairwell. "Until later then, Ayanami. Food need eat."

She blinked twice (SqueegieSqueegie) before resuming her people watching. He is.. Odd.

'\-/'

>School was almost ended. The buildings were not yet locked, awaiting the return of various club members to retrieve their things. The cleaning shift was in full swing, rearranging chairs and desks for the few classrooms still in use.<p>

That didn't stop one individual.

12:47.13 PM. ShinSeiki Kotogakkou, Women's Locker Room.

Swipe

"Plain White. Gotta love the old fashion girls.."

Swipe

"Atomic Purple! Talk about setting a trend.."

Swipe

"Ouuooo... See through lace.. Very RisquÃ©. I like."

Swipe

"A Black Bra! Life.. is mysterious.."

Swipe

"Goldenrod! You mean, they actually make stuff in this color?"

Swipe

"Oh ho ho ho! I can't believe this.. This is so 80's Anime.. This is going into my Personal collection."

Voices. Faint, but growing louder. His hypersensitive ears alerted him of the danger of discovery. He looked forlornly at the veritable treasure trove that yet lay before him; but strengthened his resolve. There's always tomorrow!



With one final look, he cinched his pack and called out his trademark phrase.

"High-Ho! Silkies, Away!"

'\-/'

>Something was hitting her lightly on the head. Rei ignored it, snuggling deeper into the hospital sheets. Whatever it was tapped her again, more insistently. She made a small sound of displeasure.<p>

"Yo."

"Mnnnnmmmm.. Goway."

"Geeze, you're Lazy. I even brought flowers."

Rei pulled the covers over her head. "Ma, goway."

"I ain't your Mom." The voice said, which caused her to wake up a bit more. "And quit hidin' under there!" She tried to surround herself with more fabric, but it wouldn't give. In fact, it went the other way.

"Aaah!"

"EH!"

The covers were back in place, but the sight of Rei's bosom was still firmly engraved on his mind. "Shinji!"

"pink. I like pink."

She blushed, wrapping the covers about herself as tightly as she could with one arm. "Mou... Jerk."

He pulled them off again. She tried to resist him, but he was too strong. His hands explored her body, touching her, enticing her. And finally, as his roving hands moved down across her flat stomach, invad-

'\-/'

>He pulled the covers off again. This time for real. "Rei, Wake up."<p>

"Eyaaaaaah!"

Crack

"Owwwww!" Shinji could feel the hot hand print across his jaw as he looked at her bra and panty clad form in confusion. Then in curiosity. He leaned over her, causing her to back away, and him to lean closer in response. Her right hand was trying to keep him at bay by being firmly planted on his chest, her pushing with all her strength. "Hold still, would you?"

Despite her outrage, and probably because of her still sleepy condition, she stopped trying to push him away for a moment.

"What?"

"Hold still."

He was still staring at her intently. But not at her at her, she realized, but at her left shoulder and arm. "What are you doing?" She said, as he covered the rest of her with the blankets.

"There's no scar."

She blinked sleepily. "No.. Scar?"

"No, none. And there really should be. How.. odd."

With a look of absolute disdain for him, she grumbled something about dreams. "Whatever. Where're the flowers?"

"Flowers? What flowers?"

She grumbled again. "Ogle me and don't even bring me flowers.. some people."

He shrugged. "Sorry. Didn't know you slept in your undies. I'll have to remember that if your mom ever sends me in to wake you up."

She shook her head, then looked down in embarrassment, her face obscured by her blue hair. "I don't sleep like this normally. It's Nerv hospital regulation. So they can have you in a plugsuit in under twelve seconds if you're catatonic."

"You're still almost nekkid." He said, slouching in the chair next to her bed.

"Your Point..?" She ground out. He simply smiled back.  
"Pervert."

"This, said to the guy who saved your life? TiskTisk, I said I was sorry."

"You don't Act like it."

"You're right -I don't. How could I be? You're beautiful."

"Grrrrrrrrr..."

He laughed. "Okay, okay! I'm sorry.." He said, bowing in his chair, right hand held vertically in front of his face as he did so.  
"Really, I am. If I'd've known, I wouldn't've done that." He coughed into his hand. "Anyway, glad to see you're up."

"I'm sure you'd rather see me 'nekkid' than 'up'."

"Of course.." He said, openly leering at her for a second before composing himself. "But that ain't gonna happen."

She noticed something. "What's that in your shirt pocket?  
Fabric?"

"Huh?" He looked, then stuffed it deeper into said pocket. "Oh, umn, just a handkerchief."

"Pink?"

He ruffled. "Somethin' wrong with that? I happen to like Pink."

"With 'Hello Kitty' on it?"

His eyebrow twitched. "Hello Kitty is Rad, I'll have you know." He managed between clenched teeth. "I prefer KeroKeropi, but today was just a Hello Kitty day."

"And lace trim?" She said, placidly.

Damn it! She knows.. "Lay. Off."

"Pervert."

He grumbled darkly, folding his arms over his chest and looking off to the side. "Well, at least you know to be on your toes now."

"Indeed."

He shuddered. "Could you, like, never say that again? You sound just like pops.."

"And now you sound like your sister!"

"..sorry.."

'\-/ ' Stanza Five: Cardiac Arrested " End

Author's Note:

Updated German bits submitted by Swedish15 from As I don't speak German, I fully appreciate the corrections from someone who does. Thanks!

-JJ Corley

## 6. Honor's Duty Chapter Six

Ludicrous Configuration! Productions Presents A Neon Genesis Evangelion Alternate Universe By JJ Corley

"I said: 'Kiss me, you're beautiful' - These are truly the last days."

School was boring. Very boring. One week into school and Shinji had to admit that Rei was right - Kurasawa-sensei only taught one subject.

"...And so the restoration of man into the second half of the twentieth century began..."

Shinji ignored him, directing his attention and a hostile gaze to the computer built into his desk. It glared back, threatening him with its digitally rendered lines of kana. There was a message for

him.

Shinji didn't like computers. They tended to either explode,  
>become completely inert, or erase themselves every time he touched  
one.<br>Computers, on the other hand, really hated Shinji.

\-/' Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty " Stanza Six: Absolute  
Kindness

"pssst! Have you heard the rumor?"

In the very back of the class, two girls began to quietly  
gossip.

"Eh! You mean He's the pilot!"

"Shhh..! Not so loud. Yeah, that's what Sana in class 2-C said,

>and she said she got it from Yuriko, who heard it from Sayuri, who  
heard it from Mao, who said she heard them talking on the roof during  
lunch on his first day here."<p>

"Mao is such a bookworm.."

"Yeah, but she said she heard Ayanami say he's Commander Ikari's  
son!"

"Commander Ikari? Who's that?"

"You don't know anything, do you? He's the leader of the organization  
that owns those big robots that saved the city."

"Where'd you get that?"

Girl A nodded at Kensuuke. "Aida told me. His dad works for them too,  
says its name is NERV or something."

"NERV? Isn't that bad grammar?"

"I think it's German."

Girl B looked confused. "But.. what're the Germans doing in Japan?  
With Giant robots even..?"

"I think it's a UN thing, really.." Girl A shrugged.

"So, you really think He's the pilot?"

"He could be. Ask him."

Girl B looked incredulously at her friend. "Me? That'd be too  
embarrassing!"

Girl A sighed, and began to type. "Fine. I'll ask him."

"On the computer..? Why didn't I think of that?"

"'Cause you're an idiot, silly."

'\-/'

> Computers really, really hated Shinji.<p>

'Are you the Pilot? Y/N?'

He scowled at the infernal device, it's cheery text message taunting him, and daunting him at the same time. He looked about the classroom, seeking the source of the transmission.

Two cute girls in the back of the class waved at him, then one typed furiously. He looked back to the screen, seeing that she had only repeated the message again.

'Did you save the city with one of those cool Robots? Y/N?'

He gulped nervously, his shaking hand reaching for the 'Y' key.  
>He closed his eyes in apprehension.<p>

Click

Nothing happened. He opened his eyes to see a 'Y' in the reply box. He had finally done it. He had finally, and successfully touched a computer without anything bad happening. Smugly, he hit the 'Enter' key.

His laptop exploded. With a sound akin to a gunshot, the thing went up in flames, attracting the attention of the entire class.

"Mr. Ikari..." Kurasawa-sensei said, adjusting his glasses.

>"You've destroyed government property. Go stand in the hall."<p>

Grumbling, his right hand blackened, Shinji complied. He really didn't like computers.

'\-/'

> "Woah.. did you see that!" Girl A whispered in awe after Shinji slid the door shut.<p>

"Yeah.." Girl B nodded. "That Nerv thing has to have some serious security to neg his computer before he could say. He's got to be the pilot. Just gotta."

"What's that?" Girl C asked from in front of them. "Ikari's the pilot?"

"Uun. Seems so. I mean, look at what happened! Let's talk to him after class." Girl A said excitedly.

The room began to buzz with the spread of the news. Kensuuke adjusted his glasses thoughtfully.

'\-/'

> Shinji continued his attack. He was in the men's restroom, a pair of buckets at his feet waiting to be filled, as he finished scrubbing his hand free of the black soot. He rinsed it off, then sniffed.<p>

"Bleah.. Still smells like acetone! Damn it.." Shoulders slumped, he

tossed the brush he had used back into the sink. "Mou.  
>Stupid computers."<p>

He left after filling the buckets, slouching back to class, and settled in next to the door. He had forty minutes to wait until the lunch bell sounded.

'\-/'

> Gendou surveyed his domain. It was quiet; and quiet was good. He looked across the expanse of his desk to the Command Center below,<br>bustling with activity even in the lull of non-combat. Well, almost bustling.

Misato grabbed the top of her shirt and fanned herself with it.

>"Geeze, I'm hot.. Are you hot?"<p>

Break time, and Maya was enjoying the free show. "Yeah, a little.."

"I hate being too hot. Stupid air conditioning, either too damn cold or not cold enough." She grumbled, continuing to fan herself.

"You wouldn't think, with all the technology we have in this place, that it'd be a problem keeping it a pleasant sixty five degrees"

>Maya sighed, fanning her face with a hand.<p>

"I know... so much for man's triumph over nature."

Ritsuko entered as Misato said this, and smiled, shaking her head. "Grumping again, Captain?"

She nodded. "Hi Ritsuko."

"Good afternoon, Sempai."

Ritsuko nodded to her young protégé. "Afternoon, Maya. I take it nothing's happening."

"Not a damn thing." Misato said, a faint look of annoyance crossing her pretty features. "I swear, the waiting kills me! I wish they'd all just attack and get it over with."

"It's only been six days since the Third Angel attacked. Be grateful for the reprieve. Next time we might not be so lucky."

"If they take too long, we could get too lax.. then 'next time'

>we'll be dead. Who knows? We might mistake one for an ugly parade balloon or... something." Misato grumbled darkly.<p>

"Parade balloon?" Ritsuko parroted incredulously. "Really Misato, perhaps it's time for you to take a vacation."

"No!" Misato shouted, then grimaced. "I can't just go off, >leaving the children in the hands of someone even less competent than I.<br>It wouldn't be fair, not to them; or any of you."

"you're.. You're right, I'm sorry. It's just that you seem so.

>tense."<p>

Maya looked on in confusion as Misato deflated somewhat. "I.. I guess I kinda am pretty worked up, arn't I?"

"Yes. As head medial director of Nerv, I suggest a nice hot bath, a few beers and a good massage."

Misato adopted the far off look of those lost in pleasurable fantasy. "Oh... I'd love that.. but where am I going find a good masseuse in this damn complex?"

"Ano.."

Both women's attention turned to Maya as she spoke up, causing the younger woman to blush. "I.. umn, that is.. I trained to be a massage therapist before getting into computers. I could... if you want, >I mean... I.." Her blush deepened. Then blurred out of the camera's extreme closeup as she was no longer in frame, Misato having since taken possession of the young woman's hand and hauling ass towards the exit.<p>

Ritsuko tittered softly to herself, amused at the captain's actions as always. "So impulsive.. I wonder if she'll ever grow out of that..?"

From high above, Gendou began fiddling with the video feed controls on his desk. "I wonder if.. Ah, yes, here we are, the women's bath.."

'\-/'

> 39 minutes, 40 seconds later, Shinji yawned for the twelfth time. His right foot was tapping out a staccato beat as he stood,<br>waiting to be relieved of his bucket holding duties. The bell rang.

The door to his left was immediately thrown aside, disgorging the classroom's contents in a silent semi-circle around him. He blinked.

>"What the..?"<p>

"Ikari!" the class rep shouted, standing in front of him. "Are you the pilot of the giant robot that saved the city?"

Hikari's timing could not have been worse, for as she asked her question, Kizuko came out of the classroom, catching his full attention.

"Well, are you or not?"

"Huh?" His attention snapped back to Hikari. "Sorry, what?"

She was faintly annoyed. "Are you the pilot of the robot or not!"

"Oh, yeah. One of them, anyway."

The student body around him broke into a jumble of voices,

>causing Kizuko to spare him a glance before climbing the stairs to the roof. "Wow, I just knew it! .. Ikari, you're the best! ... you saved us!<br>You saved our lives! ... We're so proud of you! .. Does it have a special attack? ... How big is that thing, really? ... How were you chosen? .. Ikari, have my baby!"

Shinji ignored most of it, setting his buckets down and motioning for quiet. After a few more shouted complements, the group of students subdued. "I can't say anything about it."

"What? .. Why not? .. C'mon, Ikari tell us something! ... Etc."

Shinji motioned for quiet again, and was pleased when he got it.

>"I'm sorry. I can't. I like to breathe, and I'm sure you all do too.<br>Even saying I'm a pilot might be against the rules."

There was a general consensus among them that "This sucks", and one bespectacled boy stood forward. "At least tell us this much: That giant, the Angel. What was it? Was it some country's weapon?"

Shinji shrugged. "Dunno, no one's said anything about it to me."

>"I've only been told that if I don't help destroy them, everyone'll die."<p>

The crowd began denying that possibility in various ways, until the boy in glasses managed to be heard again. "What do you mean by 'Everyone'? Everyone in the city? The country? What?"

Shinji sighed, and rubbed the back of his head almost shamefacedly. "To directly quote the commander of Nerv, 'all of mankind shall perish in fiery oblivion'."

A blank type of abject terror settled on the crowd, followed by an immediate and oppressive silence.

The boy in glasses tried to say something, but failed.

"Yeah, that kind of everyone. So, please understand when I say I don't know anything, and that I can't tell you what I do know.. If it is some country's weapon, as you said it might be, and they find out some weakness in our defenses 'cause I've been at school talkin' 'bout specs and stuff.. We all go Boom." Shinji said somberly, shaking his head.

"I see."

"Good. So, do me the favor of not asking about it. And now, if you'll all excuse me, I have an appointment to keep."

He moved through the crowd as if the students really weren't jam-packed around him, and walked off, offering a wave and a weak 'See ya later' before disappearing after Kizuko, leaving behind a tangible feeling of dread.

'\-/'

> Gendou's phone rang. He looked away from the monitor built into his desk, opening the drawer he kept the non-emergency line in, removing



the headset from its cradle. "Yes?"<p>

Kizuko. "Ikari-kun has revealed his status as Pilot to the student body."

"I see."

"Orders, sir?"

"That boy.." He said softly, then: "Bring him to me."

"Yes sir."

He replaced the phone and resumed his 'vigil'.

'\-/'

> "What about the 80mm pulse machine rifle they built for it? Have you seen that thing yet? I only saw the blue prints, but oh! It was so cool!"<p>

Shinji continued to eat his sandwich, ignoring the bespectacled boy who had introduced himself as 'Kensuuke Aida, Military Otaku at your service SIR!'. He had been weirded out at the amount of knowledge Kensuuke had about the Evangelion's and their equipment, but shrugged it off after the boy had explained it was only general knowledge gleaned from internet sites and not hush-hush secret info from his father in Nerv R&D.

Munch munch chew Gulp He had gone up to the roof in hopes of finding Kizuko, but after a through inspection, found her not. He had gone to the cafeteria instead in hopes of finding food and some quiet time to think. He had, instead, found food and a bunch of girls, girls who were practically throwing themselves at him. It was about this time that Aida stumbled along, and like soap on a greasy pan, the womenfolk fled before him.

"I hear they're building a mobile positron cannon for it. I mean, a positron cannon? Isn't that overkill? Well, considering our enemies, maybe not, but.."

It was peace, of a sort.

"Could you, like, get me in to see them?"

Shinji paused. "'Them'?"

"Yeah! The Evangelions!"

"Ehh..." He pretended to think about it, watching the other boy get his hopes up. "No."

Kensuuke looked stricken. "But-!"

"Look, Aida; I can't help you."

"But-!"

"You Ikari?"

Shinji turned, ignoring Kensuuke. "Huh? Yeah, That's me." He said to

the tall, rough looking young man in a black jumpsuit.

"Touji? Dude, you like, missed a week of class, man! What's the-  
> "Shut it, Kensuuke." The taller boy said, his eyes never leaving Shinji. "I hear you're some kinda hot shot pilot, that you're da one who saved the city."<p>

"Somethin' like that, yeah." Shinji nodded.

Touji jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Outside. Now."

Shinji blinked. He then rose, leaving the remains of his lunch behind as he followed the angry boy outside. Kensuuke hesitated a moment before following as well.

'\-/'  
> "Excuse me."<p>

The two guys stopped talking, looking to who spoke. They then took a surprised step backwards. "A-Ayanami?" Guy A said.

"Do you know the present location of Ikari, Shinji?" Kizuko asked, looking them over.

"He was in the cafeteria, but I think Suzahara challenged him to a fight or something." Said Guy B.

"Yeah, I think they went behind the Gym, out by the track field," Guy A supplied.

"Your assistance is appreciated." She said, turning towards the gym.

They waited a moment before speaking again. "Weird girl."

"Yeah. She's always so... stiff. Formal like, you know?"

"Tell me about it. But her sister... Man, that is a babe."

"Oh yeah. Still.. I wonder what she wants with Ikari?"

Guy B shrugged. "Dunno. Maybe another one of them 'Angel' things are attacking or something."

They both thought on that, then listened for sirens. "Nah."

'\-/'  
> Shinji waited for the other boy to speak, leaning on the back wall of the gym casually as Touji paced back and forth.<p>

"K', Listen." Touji began, turning to look at Shinji with his arms crossed. "My little sis got hurt bad in that fight of yours. I mean, she's still in da hospital even." He kicked a rock, watching it sail through the air to land a few feet away. "My Dad and Gramps work in yer lab, so I'm the only one that can go ta see her. It's not the goin'

>there that I mind, but... what if she gets some sorta scar? Then she'll never be a babe. Doncha feel sorry for 'er?"<p>

"Eh... I dunno." Shinji replied, cleaning his ear with the tip of his

pinky.

Touji blinked. "huh?"

"I mean, think about it:" Shinji said, coming off the wall to begin pacing himself. "Chicks with scars can be pretty babe-o-licious.

>That entire 'Cute chick, weird injury' thing kinda adds to the mystique... Makes a guy more interested, ya know? Lookit Ayanami, er.<br>Well, yeah: Both of 'em. First time I met Rei, she was all banged up,  
>and then Kizuko; well, if you can look past that sheet of ice she hides behind, she can be pretty cute too."<p>

"Yous got's a point." Touji admitted, stroking his chin.

"Besides, even if I did feel sorry for your lil' sis, -which I do, mind you-" He amended quickly, "... the best I could do is maybe pull a few strings and get 'er placed in the Pilot's ward in the HQ Hospice, but then if she's got some real bad injuries, like if she's missin' an arm, say, she'd come out with no scars a'tall. An that tends to raise more questions than the scars would."

"Yeah? Yeah... Come ta think of it, I seen both Ayanami's in dere swim suits, and yeah -fer the amount a time dey spend in 'wraps,

>they don't got a single blemish on 'em." Touji scowled. "Dat's some crazy shit, man. Shouldn't be possible, like."<p>

"You tellin' me? I friggin' put a tourniquet on Rei's bloody stump, an two days later she's in the hospital and her arm's all there,

>not a freakin' mark on 'er. I checked. Got pimp slapped for it too."<p>

"Man, dat's humiliation."

Shinji shrugged. "Yeah, but I saw 'er in 'er underwear, so I guess we're about even."

"Sweet." Touji smiled, then held out a hand. "So, I guess we clear on the situation then, eh?"

"'Bout as clear as it can be, I'm thinkin'." Shinji replied,

>taking the offered hand.<p>

"'Course, I still gotta deck you one fer puttin' my sis in da hospital."

He smiled. "Be warned, I'll return the favor for you callin' me out."

"Sounds about fair."

Wham

Shinji winced around the fist implanted in his cheek. "Man, you got quite the arm, Touji."

Likewise, Touji smiled around the fist in his face. "Same ta you, Shinji."

Mutually releasing their firm handshake, they both fell backwards. From where he lay on the ground, Suzahara raised an eyebrow.

>"Kensuuke? How long you been dere?"<p>

"Uh... Hi?" Aida offered meekly.

"Stupid, He followed us outta the Cafeteria, remember?" Shinji muttered from where he was sprawled out.

"Oh yeah. Look, Kensuuke, you're my friend and all.. but, you tell anybody 'bout this male bonding shit... I'm gonna haveta kill ya.

>Got it?"<p>

Kensuuke swallowed hard, backing up a step. "Y-y-yeah. Got it!

>Won't tell a soul!"<p>

"Good." Touji said to the accompaniment of Shinji's soft laughter.

They all paused as the sound of hurried footsteps and labored breathing became audible, and closer. Touji propped himself up as Shinji looked backwards, all three recognizing the girl as she approached.

>"Kizuko? Hey! You weren't on the roof earlier."<p>

Said bandaged, blue-haired babe stopped right above Shinji as he said this, and took a moment to catch her breath. "Ikari, we are wanted at Command."

Shinji rolled his eyes. "Joy." He said, shaking his head. Kizuko raised an eyebrow as she looked down at him.

"You do not seem enthused."

"Very observant of you." He grumbled, but brightened. "I must say, white is definitely your color."

Kensuuke and Touji snickered at Shinji, realizing the perfect vantage point the other boy had. Kizuko merely raised an eyebrow.

'\-/'

> "I don't get it.." Shinji said, as he and Kizuko endured the long walk from their school to Nerv. "I mean, I tell the teach that I have stuff to do and they let me go. I could disappear for a week and they wouldn't think twice about it. Hell, I don't think they'd even care if I do the make-up assignments they give me, so long as I come back."<p>

Indeed they were walking, after a few unsuccessful attempts to contact either of his guardians. Frustrated, he had asked Kizuko how she normally got to Nerv; and without a word the silent girl had begun the journey towards HQ on foot.

Although disgruntled at the reality of Nerv's 'walking wounded'

taking themselves to work, he found he had to pace himself only slightly to keep up with her. So, instead of pointlessly worrying over her condition, he took the opportunity to familiarize himself with the city's skyline, taking note of various convenience stores and such along their path while keeping up a one sided conversation with his silent companion.

"I guess that's the real thing behind it, though -that I come back. I wonder if anyone would miss me if I didn't. Well, Pops, sure, >but anyone here? Misato, maybe; Ritsuko too. And Rei, she might miss me,<br>since we've been talking every day. I dunno about my Father, though.."

Kizuko glanced at him. "I must have misunderstood. Did you not say that your 'Pop' would miss you? Do you not mean your father when you use this term?"

"Nah, when I say Pop I mean my foster father, Saotome Ranma-

>sensei. I have a hard time thinking of Gendou as anything but 'Father,<br>with a capital F."

A few moments of silence went by as Kizuko thought that over. "I do not understand. Why do you think of 'father' with a capital?"

Shinji shrugged. "Why do I think of 'Teacher' with a capital T?

>It's a title. Father gained it because that's what he is -my Father. But he really hasn't done anything to make me feel like he isn't a stranger;<br>I just don't think of him as family. So, it's a title, and titles get capitalized."

"I see. Do you respect your father?"

"Humnn.." He said, crossing his arms behind his head as he thought, swinging his book bag behind himself. "Yeah, I suppose I do. >Even though I didn't know him while I was growing up, I realize now it was because of his work on the Evangelion's that made him unable to care for me after mom was taken from us... I don't blame him for leaving me with Pops, 'cause mom had him do that, but it woulda been nice if he had dropped by to say hi or written or something. I guess he's just the type who gets lost in their work."<p>

"Yes, he is. I respect your father as well."

Shinji raised an eyebrow. "Yeah? What he do to get your respect?"

"He saved my life."

The other eyebrow shot skyward. "Really? Huh. Lemme guess, >problem with Unit Zero?"<p>

She nodded. "Yes. It failed the activation test, in which I received these injuries."

Shinji shuddered. "Well, at least you came back. Maybe not all of you, but you came back."

She paused, looking up at him after he turned to face her. "Why do

you say that?"

He blinked. "Huh? Say what?"

"You sound as if you are happy I did not disappear within the entry plug."

"That's because I am.. Arn't you?"

She thought for a moment, her brow furrowing slightly as her mind searched for an answer. "I am not sure."

He answered her with silence, failing to understand her at all.

>"You're not... Sure? You mean... you're not glad you didn't die?"<p>

"It is not important to me. I am easily replaced." She said,

>beginning to walk by him, but stopping as he grabbed her arm. She looked at him from the side, her gaze questioning.<p>

"Don't ever say that." He said softly as he released her arm,

>using that hand to instead brush her cheek with his fingers. "You're not replaceable. Not to me."<p>

A slight blush colored her cheeks as she met his gaze for a moment; then, turning away from him, she resumed walking. Within a few minutes of strained silence, they arrived at HQ.

Shinji saw her to the Medical Ward before making his way to the command center. A quick glance up revealed his father's desk to be empty.

The techs looked up as he arrived. "You're pilot Ikari, right"

>asked Hyuuga.<p>

He stopped, and bowed. "Yeah, I'm sorry for not introducing myself last time..."

"Hey, don't worry about it." Aoba said, looking up from Love Hina Volume 11. "It was a little tense when you got here."

"Eh... Still. I'm Ikari Shinji. Nice to meet you all."

"Hyuuga Makoto." Said the shorthaired guy in glasses. "Nice to make your acquaintance, Pilot. Thanks for saving our asses."

"Aoba Shigeru." Said the suspiciously American-looking Manga reading guy. "Thanks to your efforts, I will live to read the rest of Love Hina! You're my hero, man!"

"Aoba, you're such a fool." The shorthaired girl said, sticking her tongue out at him. Shinji recognized her voice from his brief spat in/with Unit-00. "Ibuki Maya. You have my admiration, Ikari-san."

"I'd rather have your number, or a date. Preferably both." He said,

throwing his suave charms into full gear.

Oh my god! WhatamIgoingtodo? Maya thought, blushing fiercely.

"Ouuooo!" Aoba and Hyuuga chorused.

"Smooth, man!"

"Way to go!" Matoko said in bad English.

"Is.. Isn't it against corporate... I mean, government policy to date coworkers?" Maya asked meekly.

Aoba and Hyuuga switched their attention from Maya to Shinji.

"Nah. I'm piloting and general ass-kicking, while you're in the command-technician department. It's like if my Father was getting some with Dr. Akagi. No one'd care."

Hyuuga and Aoba switched focal points again, waiting for her reaction.

"Eh? But, I, um.. I'm older than you?"

Again, the two men switched their view, interested in how Shinji would refute this remarkably valid point.

The young man gave it a moment of thought, then shrugged. "Eh,

>what's four years in the face of love, let alone wide-scale destruction,<br>Alien Invasion, and the possibility of immanent death?"

Sighing in abject defeat, the poor girl deflated somewhat, her coworkers snickering. "It's 0109-88-4142."

Aoba and Hyuuga gave Shinji the victory sign as Shinji whipped out a pocket book, scribbled down her number, and put it back wherever it came from. "Thanks! I'll give you a call sometime. Maybe I could talk you into showing me around the city? I haven't had the chance to see much of it yet."

"Yeah? I.. I think that might be a possibility."

A pair of hands alighted on Shinji's shoulders, causing him to raise an eyebrow, Hyuuga and Aoba quickly swiveling around as they began to work again. "Chatting up the cuties, are we, Shin-chan?"

"Hey Ritsu. I even got her number, too."

The blonde scientist cringed slightly at the nickname, being reminded of a certain person who called her the same one and shared many of Shinji's attributes. Or was it the other way around? "Oh, I see.

>Congratulations. You've smitten my daughter, frustrated Misato, broken through Kizuko's ice veneer, and working on Maya too?"<p>

"Yup. But, don't forget -I hit on you as well." He said,

>smiling.<p>

"You're so shameless." She said good-humouredly, ruffling his hair.  
"Is he bothering you, Maya?"

"No.. Not at all. I'm... flattered, really."

"Lucky you, Ikari. But.. I'm going to kick you out  
anyway."

"Figures. Hey, where can I find the old man?"

"You could try his office." Ritsuko offered.

'\-/'

> Knock Knock<p>

The sound echoed off the large metal door and continued,  
>unabated, down the empty hallway.<p>

"Enter."

Upon opening the door, Shinji found himself under his father's  
inscrutable gaze. He almost felt intimidated. Almost.  
Click

"Wonderful job you've done, Shinji.." Gendou started, his hands  
dropping from their usual position to rest on the large desk in his  
office. "Telling the student body you're a pilot. What does it get  
you?"

"A few one night stands and a bunch of female admirers?" The young  
man offered.

"Well yes.." Gendou seceded, "But it could also get you  
killed."

"Assassination?" Shinji hazarded, only to have Gendou nod.  
>"Damn, didn't think of that." He frowned. "'Bout the only thing I  
can't dodge is bullets. Guess I'll have to be more  
careful."<p>

"What's done is done. My recommendation is for you to refrain from  
telling anyone else."

"But.. that 'I'm a pilot and tonight my be our last night to live'  
line works so well! I mean.." He pulled an address book from his back  
pocket and flipped through a few pages, "I've already gotten  
seventeen phone numbers, six dates, three offers for sex, and one  
girl who wants to marry me. It's great! And you want me to stop?" He  
paused,  
>shaking his head slightly while giving his father a dubious look.  
"Are you out of your mind?"<p>

Gendou blinked. "Well.. Continue at your own discretion."

Shinji smirked. "Thanks, Father. That all you called me in  
for?"



"Not quite." The elder Ikari said, adjusting his glasses. "How are you finding your accommodations?"

"Very much to my liking. Babes, Beer, and a bird. What else could a teenager want in a room?"

"I see. School?"

Shinji snorted in contempt. "All the teacher ever does is drone on about second impact. It's boring, not to mention grossly inaccurate."

"Indee-Wait a second. How do YOU know about THAT?" Gendou asked, >a note of alarm in his voice.<p>

"Duh. You're the one who sent Ryouji to Ranma-Sensei for stealth training." Shinji intoned, offering his father a placid look.

"Oh. So he told you?" Shinji nodded and Gendou sighed. "I swear, >if the man wasn't so useful I'd have him shot."<p>

"You do know he's a double agent, right?" Shinji asked.

"Of course."

"Just checking. Well, I'm off. See ya later, old man."

"Feh." Gendou snorted as his son left. "Rambunctious youth."

'\-/'  
> Knock Knock<p>

Rei looked up from the history book she was currently reading to see Shinji standing by the door to her room. "Yes?"

"Hey. I've got some time to kill before the Induction Mode test tonight. Feel up for a bit of a walk?" He asked.

"Sure! Let me just slip a hospital gown on real quick." She said, dropping the schoolbook on a nearby hospital tray table stacked with assignments before tossing the covers aside and gingerly standing up.

Though only clad in her underwear, and feeling his gaze on her lithe body, Rei didn't mind, much, anymore. Over the past six days she and Shinji had come to an understanding: As long as he refrained from stealing her panties and didn't touch without permission, he was free to look as long and as hard as he pleased.

It was still unnerving at times, but the rational part of her mind knew he was just curious about a woman's body. She got a bit of a thrill out of it, though, knowing his undivided attention was on her,

>and that he would probably do anything for a chance to run his hands over her smooth, soft skin...<p>

She was snapped out of that thought as a searing lance of pain ripped through her injured arm. She gasped slightly, then sighed.

>"Shinji, would you mind...?"<p>

"Sure thing, Rei." He replied, moving behind her and tying the gown shut. "You know you're beautiful, right?"

"Of course. You only tell me every day."

He chuckled as she also donned a robe, the IV line trailing out of her collar. "I can't help telling the truth."

She cinched the robe's belt about her waist with little difficulty, and took the wheeled IV hanger in hand. "Well, shall we?"

He bowed, saying "Ladies first."

The Medical Wards were located just under the main command center, and just above the Evangelion Cage, affording the two teens with a beautiful late evening view of the Geofront's landscape. They stopped at one point along the gigantic pane of Plexiglas, which extended the entire length of the Medical Ward on all sides of the Nerv Pyramid,

>enjoying the view in a companionable silence.<p>

"Say, Shinji...?"

"Mnn...?"

"When do you think the next Angel will attack?"

She watched his features turn serious for the moment he mulled over the question. "I dunno." He finally said. "I do hope it'll be a while, if at all."

"I hope so. I don't want you out there alone."

"Regardless, it's not the fighting that worries me. It's the fact that no one seems to know just who, or what, our Enemy is."

Rei idly wheeled the IV stand back and forth, not quite knowing what to say. "They're obviously not peaceful. But, someone must know something -we have the Eva's, after all. Creating a weapon of that scale requires some foresight, you know."

He turned his head to look at her, narrowing his eyes. "You know something. But what?"

She dropped her gaze, looking out to the deep man made lake below, watching the orange light play across the water's surface. "I'm not at liberty to discuss that information with persons under Ultra-

>Violet clearance."<p>

He blinked. (SqueegieSqueegie) "UV Protection! You mean you've got UV Clearance? Then what am I?"

"No, I'm just held under high confidence by the Commander." She smiled wryly. "As for you, I think you're Blue level, but you'd have to verify that."

He grumbled. "In other words, you're saying if I want answers, I

should ask my Father."

"Ind.. Er, yeah. Pretty much."

He made a soft disgruntled sound before removing himself from the rail and walking on. She followed, easing her way up to walk next to him. "So, how was school today?"

"Eh, not too bad, but a bit busier than normal."

"How so?"

"Well... Some girls tried to chat with me over the computers,  
>but... Umn, when I tired to respond, mine kinda... blew up."<p>

She scrunched up her face. "Your computer blew up? Why?"

"I'm not entirely sure. Every time Me, my Pops, or any of the martial artists he knows who are as good as he is touch a computer,

>something strange happens. They blank out, or erase themselves, or sometimes just... blow up. Damn, the school's prolly going to send me the bill, too."<p>

"That's bizarre."

"Tell me about it. A friend of Pops said once that it had something to do with how we regulate our Ki, said that since we kinda store it like, and keep a reserve, we turn our bodies into one big capacitor. And when we touch sensitive electronic equipment and the like, we screw it up. Too much electromagnetic radiation, or we cause a short circuit, or somethin'. I wasn't really paying attention to the conversation at the time."

"Must be hard, not being able to use a computer." Rei mused.

"Eh, it's not so bad. Xian Puu said she thought that heavy duty magnetic radiation shielding might keep that from happening. Since I've got some cash now, I'm thinking about bugging the guys in R&D to slap something together for me. On the up side, I can get free games at Arcades and cokes out of vending machines and the like." He finished smugly.

"I don't believe that for a second." She said, then, "Your Sensei knows someone named Xian Puu?"

"The lounge is up ahead, I'll prove it. And yes, he does. Nice gal, too... Though still a bit sore that she didn't get to marry Pops, I think. Any way, after that, the guys in our class managed to get me to squeal that I was a Pilot. It's kinda funny, my pocket book's almost filled with addresses and phone numbers of beautiful girls. One of 'em wants to marry me even, can you believe that?"

"Welcome to the world of instant celebrity." Rei commented wryly.

"Feh." He said as they reached the small lounge area. All three walls were covered with vending machines of various make, with various wares: Coffee, Soda, instant ramen, assorted snack foods, beer, and

one that sold an assortment of undergarments. Shinji raised an eyebrow at that last one, then wandered over to the ICC Coffee machine. "I can see it now..." He smacked the button for a light coffee. After a moment the machine made a series of complaining noises, and a can rolled out obligingly. He stooped, retrieved it, and then posed for Rei. "ICC coffee: rich flavor, for those with discerning taste."

She snorted at him, amused. "Yeah, dress you in your Plug Suit and you could probably sell that stuff easy. Hey, and get me a sour apple soda while you're at it."

He shrugged, then browsed the machines, finally finding one with the requested beverage. He pressed the button, and two popped out.

>"Oops. Held the button too long, I think."<p>

Rei giggled softly. "That's okay. I'll drink the other one later."

They sat on one of the benches, sipping at their drinks. "What else happened today?"

"Eh, I got pestered by this guy named Aida for a tour of the Eva Cage..."

She rolled her eyes. "Will that boy ever give up?"

"Oh, bugged you about it too, did he?" She nodded an affirmative and he continued, "Anyway, then there was this guy, Suzahara. He dragged me outside and started going off about how his younger sister got put in the hospital because of the Angel attack. I 'apologized' to him. Not much I can do about it, but I feel sorry for the kid."

"Yeah. I hope he wasn't too harsh with you. When something like this hurts family, it really hits hard. The poor guy is probably feeling a bit helpless about this entire situation."

"Uun. Next Angel I see, I'm going to belt it one for Suzahara's little sister. Those invading bastards deserve it, for all the pain they've caused."

She reached over and covered his right hand with her still recovering left, giving him a gentle squeeze. "Shinji... I'm sorry you had to get caught up in all of this..."

He turned to look at her, catching her eyes; and moving his hand so that he could return the gentle sign of kindness. "No, don't be. All my life, I've been raised, trained, and told countless times to help people, no matter what. And now, I'm helping everyone, even if they don't realize it. It's not exactly what I was planning to do at this stage of my life," He said, smirking slightly, "...but I think it's for the best. I can make a difference here. And that's all I've ever wanted to do with my life. Make a difference."

Damn you, Shinji Ikari! She cursed mentally, trying not to cry, I'm so proud of you, and I love you so much... and I can't tell you without you asking questions I can't answer! Unable to speak, she did the only thing she could think of.

Shinji was surprised when his vision was filled with a pair of half lidded red eyes holding tears at bay, fair flawless skin, and cool cobalt blue hair. He pulled back just slightly before her lips met his,  
>and a distinct trill ran through his body, stealing his breath away.<p>

To Rei, that image of shocked innocence would be treasured forever.

'\-/ ' Stanza Six: Absolute Kindness " End

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>Author's Notes -<br> And finally, this Stanza is closed. I can't tell you all how good that makes me feel, as it's been close to a year since I last released anything for this series. My apologies.

I hope you've enjoyed this chapter of Honor's Duty.

-JJ Corley

## 7. Honor's Duty Chapter Seven

Ludicrous Configuration! Productions Presents A Neon Genesis Evangelion Alternate Universe By JJ Corley Associate Author: David McMillan <http://mslcp>. are better ways to let a woman know you care besides slapping their ass and asking for another drink."  
-Chabol

Shinji shifted uncomfortably as he sat in Unit-01's control couch awaiting the start of the Induction Mode test (whatever that was). The 'plug suit' they had issued him as standard wear while piloting was going to need a little getting used to -the material,

>seemingly a spandex variant, was thick, stretchy, and rubbed all the right places in the wrong way.<p>

Shinji was hoping it would get better once the plug was filled with LCL. God knew it couldn't get any worse.

"How the hell does Rei put up with this?"

"You get used to it after a while," Misato answered from the observation chamber, set at Evangelion eye-level and adjacent to the testing chamber. She had already heard this line of complaint from Rei, and didn't want to hear it from Shinji. "Anyway," she asked in an effort to keep his mind off the plug suit, "how's it going at school?"

"I had the most unusual day..." He appeared to be slightly dazed just thinking about it.

Misato raised an eyebrow. "Oh, really? What happened?"

"I blew up a computer, got a pocket full of phone numbers,  
>was punched in the head, chatted up Ibuki, was rebuked by Father,<br>and Rei tongued me," he said happily.

'\-/ ' Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty " Stanza Seven: Ikari's

Good Mood

Misato blinked. "Well, I was asking more about school work than social life, but fair's fair. Ready for your Induction Mode test?"

"Yeah, though I'm not quite sure what an 'Induction Mode'

>is."<p>

"When Ritsuko gets here I'll have her explain everything"

>Because I haven't the foggiest either. Misato thought, while giving Shinji a cheerful little smile. She dropped the charade as he frowned and returned to his own thoughts. To be honest, we should really be running him through a Synchronization Mode... The thought trailed off as she met the hard gaze of Unit-01, standing ready in the test cage before her.<p>

Ritsuko came in, barking a curt "Status!" before slowing next to Misato. She listened idly, comparing notes on her ever->present clipboard as the resident techs called off from their stations. "Well and good, but we're changing the schedule. Induction Mode will be resumed after successful Synchronization Mode test -And by successful I mean an all green, not any of that Olive Drab crap like the LAST TIME. I think you all remember that 'incident'. Have the Bakelite suspension ejectors ready, just to be on the safe side.<br>Let's do this right the first time, people."

Misato and Ritsuko shared a look. We don't need another failed activation test on our hands.

"So, this is Unit One, huh?" Shinji said finally, after successful linkup and activation of the Evangelion. Not to mention the LCL flood, which did manage to relieve the chafing of the plug suit to some degree. "You know, it smells like Rei in here, after a shower, with the lavender shampoo that's her favorite..."

"And how would you know that?" Demanded a small, angry Ritsuko that popped up in a comm. window.

"...You mean to tell me she hasn't told you about our sordid love affair?"

"Oh, very funny, Ikari," Ritsuko ground out. "Try again.<br>Maybe you'll win something."<p>

"..." Shinji's eyes widened a bit at the normally affable Ritsuko's response, but he wisely stayed silent.

"Geeze, Ritsu," Misato said, eyeing her roommate, "what's gotten you in such a bad mood, anyway? You seemed fine an hour ago."

"I was fine an hour ago," Ritsuko replied flatly. "But I had to perform a... service call... in the Commander's office."

Misato blinked, and felt her eyes widen slightly.

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> The man himself sat behind his desk in his usual pose,<br>still, unmoving. A statue of vigilance, staring down into the deep dark

surface of his massive obelisk of a desk, as if the secrets and answers he sought could be found within.

It would have been impressive, almost, save the silence of his vigil was broken by muffled grunts of effort, vaguely feminine,

>emanating in an uneven rhythm from under his desk. Had there been another observer, they would have remarked on a sound akin to flesh slapping lewdly against flesh, yet oddly muffled.<p>

Oh, and the impressive array of tools on the desk, laid out and prepared for use, was a major clue that something was going on.

The semi-lewd noise continued unabated, and Gendou seemed to rock ever so slightly with each repetition. This continued for a moment until a vague note of surprise was heard from under the desk,

>followed by a muffled thump. Gendou smirked. "Oh, Baby..." He drawled seductively.<p>

"That was uncalled for," came a female voice from underneath. A slim hand reached up from between his legs, palm up.

>"I need something."<p>

"Oh?" He said, feigning ignorance. "What do you need?"

"You know..." She said, leaning forward to peek at him.

>"Third one from the left."<p>

"Allen?" He asked, examining the oddly curved tool. "But you've used him three times already."

"He's the only one that fits properly. Now, give, or I'm going to leave," Ritsuko grumbled darkly, very uncomfortable with and very, very annoyed at being under the desk AGAIN.

He placed the wrench in her palm, and she continued after a moment. "I swear..." she grumbled, "If I didn't need you here to adjust for clearance, this would go much faster." Her arm hit his thigh again, and she wrinkled her nose in distaste as she continued to rummage around within the guts of the top-down inlaid monitor system, "You want to tell me how you broke your surveillance monitor this time, or do I want to know?"

"I kicked it," He admitted, sheepishly, "after a particularly maddening session with the council."

"Delicate technology. You should be careful. This is the fifth time this month." She listened to him mumble an apology before continuing, "I'm beginning to think you like having me crammed down here between your legs."

"I have to admit, the prospect is rather... Enjoyable."

"In your dreams, Ikari."

"...Damn."

\-/'

> Ritsuko shuddered at the memory. She gave Misato's grimace a

commiserating look.<p>

"Service... call?" Misato inquired apprehensively.

"On his security monitor!" Ritsuko snapped. "Not.  
>anything like you're thinking."<p>

"Oh." Misato looked relieved. "Which one?"

"The one in his desk," Ritsuko replied without thinking.

"That's the one..." Misato trailed off, and Ritsuko nodded.

"Got it in one, Misa-chan."

"Old man Fuyutsuki in there too?"

Ritsuko shook her head no. "Thankfully. Having him around would have only added to the humiliation. The problem wasn't too bad. I managed to get it fixed within five minutes -one of the circuit boards had been cracked and needed replacement. A quick in->out job."<p>

"Well, such is life." Misato shrugged, as if to say what can one do about it, before continuing. "Shinji wants to know what it is he'll be doing. I told him you could explain it better than I could."

"We'll be performing an Induction Mode test, of course." She noted Shinji's blank look and flipped a few pages on her clipboard.

>"Hummn. Also called Trigger Priority Mode. Placing priority on gun operation rather than brain wave synchronization."<p>

"Gun?" The tone was frank disbelief, the EVA's body language reflecting righteous outrage.

"Yes, why?"

"I refuse to use a gun." Shinji stated flatly. Unit-01 crossed its arms over its chest and turned its head to the side in defiance. "It's dishonorable."

"Oh, yes. I'm quite sure that the Angels give a damn about honor; yours, theirs or otherwise," Ritsuko said in a monotone. "You will use the gun."

"No, I shall not. A weapon of that sort goes against every value I have. Until the enemy uses something similar, I will not use any type of gun on them."

"Ouuo, very noble." Misato said.

Ritsuko just shook her head and sighed. "Your nobility is misplaced, Shinji."

"Perhaps, but it is my decision," He said.

"How about a compromise?" Misato asked, folding her arms over her chest. "This is just a test: let Ritsu compile the data she needs,



and you can choose when or if you will use the guns we have available as the situation allows."

The Eva's head turned back to them. "I don't like it, but.  
>if it's only a test, I suppose it's all right."<p>

"Okay then. Retrieve the automatic rifle in weapon bay one and let's begin," Ritsuko said as Misato pulled up a chair.

Shinji did so, running through a quick field inspection of the weapon. He ejected the clip, noted it was a simple battery, and replaced it. A quick check of the barrel noted an obstruction, and a strange muzzle tip. "Laser tag?" he asked finally.

"Very astute for someone who loathes firearms."

"To quote Pops: a weapon is a weapon, like it or not. Kumon-

>sensei taught me how to use them. Haven't liked guns since."<p>

"Sorry to hear that. Most of our Anti-Angel ordinance is ranged, using firearms for delivery to target. The weapon you hold now is modified to emit light only. The walls of this cage are light sensitive, and we will be running a program through the direct visual connections to simulate an external area and hostile targets.  
>To put it simply, you just have to stand there and shoot. Like playing a video game," Ritsuko explained, checking a few items off her clipboard as the techies called out reports and status changes.<p>

"I can live with that."

"Good. Let's start, then."

The visual panels on the interior of the entry plug cycled through a quick check, and then the walls of the test chamber were replaced with the cityscape of Tokyo-3. A bold, stylized text message of 'HEAVEN OR HELL' flickered across the screen, followed by 'STAGE ONE' and an announcer calling 'Let's Rock!'. A large, >cartooned version of Sachiel suddenly loomed above the buildings not so far away, and Shinji opened fire, felling the Angel only to have Godzilla and Mothra emerge from Tokyo-3 bay and the skies respectively, and Shinji in turn laid them low. "This might actually be fun, after all..." He mused, before swapping a fresh clip and taking out a giant Doremon only to have Ultraman threatening him on the left.<p>

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> Ritsuko was idly checking off more items on her clipboard as Shinji performed above average in the simulation. It would appear,<br>his stance on guns notwithstanding, he was getting into it, the Evangelion pantomiming his hiding behind a building to reload before spinning around and firing again.

"Simulate weapon jamming, irreparable." Misato called to the techs. The response from Shinji was immediate swearing as he levered the bolt back repeatedly, to no avail. He took cover behind the building only he could see before using the comm.

"Misato, my gun's jammed. Can't fix it."

"Have you memorized the locations of the weapons bays and armed buildings within Tokyo-Three?" She asked in return.

"Hell no."

"Well if you HAD, you could have gotten yourself another gun," Misato replied testily.

"..." Shinji shrugged, flipping off the connection with Misato. He then opened another window with a thought. The visuals remained blank, red text marked 'Sound Only' as he addressed it.  
>"Magi, overlay visuals with grid map of Tokyo-Three, highlight all weapons depots and armed buildings accessible by Eva's orange,<br>nearest red, soonest."

"This request will require sixty seconds to perform." The Magi control systems replied.

"Do it in thirty."

"Compliance."

He moved within the simulated world, ducking and weaving as necessary to avoid various flying Ordinance, rockets, and energy lances. Finally, a small grid map appeared in the lower right corner of the display screen, with a chibi icon of Unit-01's head and a pair of lines indicating his field of vision. He turned the Eva until the lines swept towards and bracketed the red dot, and found a building in the main view outlined in red. "That's handy. Thanks for the good work, Magi."

"You are welcome, pilot. Terminating communicatÃ© in 5."

Shinji let the communications window drop on its own accord as he navigated his way to the weapons building. The steel security door rolled up as he approached, revealing a pair of handguns.  
>Taking them up, he looked them over before announcing:  
"Unreal."<p>

Any further quips were cut short as his digital enemies found him yet again, and he was forced to teach his foes the true meaning of peace through superior firepower.

\-/'

> Within the observation chamber, Ritsuko nodded to herself and made a note: Pilot use of Magi for field map. "Intuitive. I must admit I didn't expect him to know about his Magi access privileges."<p>

"Wait, he has access to the Magi?" Misato said, confused.

"Only when piloting, but yes. He can request various types of information, including maps, the locations of Eva exit gates,

>emergency power sources, recovery routes, and as he just did -locations of armed buildings and weapons storage lockers. He can access text transcripts of verbal orders transmitted to him via the communications system, coordinate suppressing fire from the armed

buildings and request air support."<p>

"Sounds like blue level clearance."

"Until he gets promoted, pretty much."

Misato shrugged. "Well, I'm heading home. I've got some stuff I need to take care of... for tonight."

Ritsuko blinked. "Tonight?" She checked her watch, looking for the date. "Oh, You're right. Umn... What are we going to do with Shinji?"

"Don't worry." Misato said conspiratorially. "I, have a plan."

\-/'

> Gendou was not impressed. "You want me to do what?"<p>

"You know, just have him over for the night, talk, do some of that male bonding stuff," Misato said cheerily, her hand waiving in the 'you know what I mean' gesture.

"Male... bonding?" Gendou repeated.

"Yeah. You know."

"No. I do not," Came the flat reply.

"Oh." Misato paused, thinking. "Well, umn... neither do I.  
>Just, ah... Just rent a video or something."<p>

The High Commander of Nerv gave that a thought. "That is.

>acceptable. I will make the necessary arrangements."<p>

"Thanks, boss," Misato said with a smile.

"Although I wonder why tonight, of all nights?"

"Girl's night in," was all the explanation Gendou received as Misato ducked out of his ever-imposing office.

"Ah," He said. He then made a call.

\-/'

> Shinji sighed as he stepped out of the testing cage. It might have only been a simulation, but remaining synched with the Eva for upwards of an hour really sapped him. He scrubbed a hand through his LCL soaked hair as he walked over to Ritsuko. "So? How'd I do?"<p>

"See for yourself." She said, handing him her clipboard. The top page was a line graph, comparing his score with that of Rei and Kizuko. Of the two, Kizuko had the higher score, being stage seven out of ten, Rei's capping off at the tail end of stage six. His own dwarfed them both, ending where Voltron had surprised him with a sword slash at the end of stage 9. "Woah," He Keanued. "You know, I could have gotten to stage ten if you had told me there were melee attacks in there as well."

"Always expect the unexpected." She replied, smiling. "You did far better than any of us predicted. Even your father. Which reminds me, he called earlier, said something about the dinner tonight being on him."

"Oh, great," Shinji deadpanned. "Meal with Father. Whatever it is, I bet it's on ice."

"Don't be so harsh on your father, Shin-chan. He has been known to be a decent fellow from time to time. Now go and get changed, your father's chauffeur is going to pick you up in ten minutes."

"Yay. Just enough time to bathe if I hurry." He said,  
>matching actions to words by heading out of the observation chamber at a good clip.<p>

\-/'

> Gendou's condominium was situated on a mountain above one of the many sub-entrances of Nerv. This wasn't surprising. The house was. It was simply a corner jutting out of the rock face, with a door on one side and windows on the other. "That's my Father"<br>Shinji muttered, knocking on the door, "A Genius engineer, but a completely worthless architect."

The door swung inward, revealing Gendou in his On Duty uniform and a pizza box. "Oh. You're here earlier than I expected,  
>Shinji. Congratulations on your score with the Induction mode test.<br>Pizza?" He asked, opening the box to reveal a pepperoni, mushroom,  
>green pepper, olive and chive pizza.<p>

"Sure. Pizza is... good." Shinji said, taking a slice from the box as he stepped inside. "But why're you standing at the door with the Pizza?"

"It was just delivered a moment ago. I hadn't time to set it down yet when you knocked," his father explained, setting the box on the kitchenette counter.

Shinji gave the place a quick once over. There were two black leather overstuffed chairs in the living room, one closer than the other to the couch, which dominated the center of the room. To his right were the main bedroom and bathroom. A bank of windows replaced the wall further left and extended slightly behind them.  
>The entrance was also behind him, leading to the porch and a stairway to the street. Beyond the doorway to the kitchenette lay the dinning room, and what appeared to be a guest bedroom.<p>

"Nice pad." Shinji said, and then gestured to the surroundings, "Must've cost you a lot to have this place embedded into the mountainside."

"Embedded? No, no no. Too expensive," Gendou admonished his son, handing him a plate to put the pizza slice on, "Chiseled now,

>that's another question entirely."<p>

"You're shitting me. Chiseled?" Shinji asked, quite astonished.

Gendou kept up his front for a moment, before relenting.

>"Actually, it was already like this when I discovered it. Don't know how the guy I bought it from got it into the cliff-face, but I have to admit, it's a unique place. That it's right next to a sub-<br>entrance for the GeoFront makes it rather handy to get to and from work."

"Yeah, I was surprised when that security goon just plopped me into the lift and told me to have fun."

Gendou actually chuckled at that. "Was he short, stocky, and balding by any chance?"

"Yeah, why?"

"That'd be the S3 section chief, Garibaldi. Man has an odd sense of humor. Good security man, though. Very good. Also very laid back, for someone who worships the Egyptian god of frustration."

Shinji reached over for another slice of pizza. A quiet moment passed between them, both men lost as to what to say, or do.

>Father and son, yes -complete strangers, yes. Finally, Gendou adjusted his glasses, clearing his throat. "So... What have you been doing with your life, Shinji?"<p>

Shinji raised an eyebrow. "I should ask you the same thing."

"I've been trying to save the world," his father replied casually.

The younger Ikari nodded, his gaze traveling from his father to the pizza box, and he withdrew another slice before answering. "I guess... I guess I was learning how. I've never known... but mom,

>she knew, didn't she? That this was going to happen one day."<p>

"Yes. Yes, she did."

Shinji ate the rest of his pizza in silence, then set his plate in the sink. "So..." he said at length.

"Hummn...?"

"What're we doing tonight?"

"I, umn, rented a movie. Sound good?"

"Fair enough..."

\-/'

> "This has got to be the worst porn EVER." Misato commented, lazing on the couch with Ritsuko in front of the TV,<br>watching said bad pornography.

Ritsuko, sprawled lazily on the floor while using the couch as a backrest, scrunched her nose in distaste as she grunted an agreement. She was idly wondering why a floating 20 meter phallus from 'Outer Space' would bother raping earth women in the first place.

Most of the girls 'featured' were barely up to her standards.

Not that she HAD standards for that sort of thing. "I thought we were renting something with lots of hot, naked men in it." She stated, watching the 3N tentacle invade the 6X/3 orifice in 1E10 power seconds.

Doing the math was the only thing keeping her awake at this point.

It was a 'Ladies Night In', so to speak, with Rei still the hospital another day for final checkups, and Shinji at his father's.

>Gendou, for some unfathomable reason, had 'elected' to put his son up for the evening in his condo, leaving the two women to their own devices.<p>

Those devices consisted mainly of a tap for the keg and the remote for the DVD player.

Misato waited a moment, eyeing the counter on the player display. "We did. When the counter hits 15 minutes, the hunky heroes show up."

Both women waited a moment. 00:15 struck. Sirens wailed shrilly to life, bringing onto the scene...

Ritsu blinked. "Firemen?"

"'Filmed on virtual site in New York City'..." Misato read after pulling a well-hidden and -glued insert out of the DVD box,

>frowning. "'Special 9-11 commemorative version with digital firemen replacing...'." She snorted in pure disgust. "'...Duke Nukem and the Jango Fett Clones.'"<p>

"Good lord! Commemorative porn!" Ritsuko looked to her roommate in abject horror as the Firemen began pumping copious amounts of cream onto the purple thing, the Fire chief screaming something about the alien's supposed 'lactose intolerance' as another began to shoot the thing with a pair of large hand cannons.

>"Please, turn it off!"<p>

Click

"I hope to GOD I never have to see anything like that again!" Ritsuko moaned, collapsing fully onto the carpet.

"Well, you'll have to face a different big purple monster come tomorrow morning, you know."

"Ug. Don't remind me. I'm half tempted to tell the boys in R&D to change the paint job as is."

'\-/'

> "This is undoubtedly the worst porno flick I've ever seen"<br>Shinji commented from the large, over stuffed black leather chair he was seated in, eyeing the TV.

His father, reclined in another of said chairs, grunted in agreement, reaching the same conclusion. "What was this called again? I should have the producer shot."

Shinji, seated closest, snagged the DVD box off the coffee table "Umn," he said, fumbling for the box, as his eyes were unfortunately glued to the screen as another underage-looking model was snatched by the ugly floating purple phallus. "... Virtuo Studio's 'Duke Nukem and the Fett Brothers in: Aliens: Cum Get Some!'."

"Correction, I will have the producers shot." The elder Ikari muttered tiredly.

The counter hit 00:15.

"Is that a mob of half-naked clones?" Shinji asked, his tone indicating slight horror.

"Am I really seeing a milk truck fitted with a fire hose"  
>Gendou replied, much the same way.<p>

"Is that Duke Nukem in a rhinestone encrusted Wang-Sock"  
>they both chorused in mutual disgust.<p>

"I'm turning this off, now." Gendou quickly took the remote in hand, viciously stabbing the power button.

Click

"Gah... The horror, the horror!" Shinji cried half-  
>heartedly, sinking deeper into his chair. "Can I suggest a more appropriate father-son bonding activity?"<p>

"What?"

Shinji quickly sat up again. "We take the DVD, smash it into small plastic bits, burn them to fine ash, and return the dust back to the rental place."

Gendou got up, removing the DVD from the tray. "No. I, have a plan." He motioned to Shinji to get the box as he went for his uniform coat. "Come with me."

"Alright, but I swear to you old man, if any Angel EVER looks like that preposterously proportioned purple penis thing,  
>there isn't anything you can do to get me NOT to kill it."<p>

"You and me both."

'\-/'

> Yasaku Narugasei was a 20 year old clerk working for Rock&Bitch Video Boutique. A very happy, snickering clerk working for Rock&Bitch, even at 2 am. He had done the impossible. He had managed to convince not one, but two people to rent the #1 'Never Rented Movie Ever'. He could almost smell the bonus bucks he was going to accumulate from that sale. He would soon laud his Rock&Bitch Bucks over his fellow employees, and that X-Box Gate 5 system would be his, all for the taki-<p>

He blinked. What was that loud rumbling sound?

He watched as a few of the carefully stacked videos began to rattle off the shelves, muttering a 'what the?' as he turned around.

Just in time to see the giant armored purple foot fall straight down into one of the empty parking spaces. The resulting shockwave broke every pane in the glass front building, knocking every shelf in the store over, and breaking a half-dozen TV's.

He recognized that foot from TV. From the Nike ad, actually.

>'Nike: The only running shoe that KICKS ANGEL \$\$! (size 438E6 not available for civilian sale)'

From high above, perched on Unit-01's broad left shoulder,

>gripping the access ladder on the side of the Eva's face for support, stood Ikari Gendou. He was looking quiet pleased.<p>

Yasaku meekly came out of the building, looking up. And up, >and up, and then farther up a bit. "Umn..." He said, suddenly sounding like a pimply 14 year old working at McDonald's, "You can't park that here."<p>

"Crush him now, Giant Robo!" Gendou commanded. Shinji lowered Unit-01 onto one knee, maneuvering the massive right hand to grab the offending human. Yasaku was then raised to Gendou's eye level.

It is fair to say Yasaku was quite frightened. More so when he saw Gendou's sharp, shark-like smile.

But he was absolutely mortified when Gendou raised his other hand, displaying... The Box. "You gave me bad porn. I don't like that. Now, the question is, what're you going to do about it?"

The young man's beleaguered brain began yammering at him, >telling Yasaku to start babbling about how it was his favorite, the greatest porn ever. If they buy it, they'll be so much in pity of my obvious mental defectiveness that they'll leave me alone!<p>

That is, if they decide mercy-killing isn't in order...

Yasaku whimpered.

Twenty minutes later, Shinji was steering Unit-01 back towards the nearest launch rail, several hundred DVD's piled high in its right palm.

Gendou was still wearing that sharp toothed shark's smile.

"God, I've always wanted to say that line."

"Whatever you say, Daisaku."

'\-/'

> The next morning found Shinji walking back to the apartment he shared with the girls. Last night's activities had been mildly amusing, everything considered. He hadn't known his Father actually had a bit of wit, and oft times give a running commentary, which added to the movie viewing experience rather than being annoying. It



was akin to watching a Mystery Science Theatre, but with better movies.<p>

He'd probably do it again, he decided, if asked. There were, >after all, worse ways to waste time.<p>

And it wasn't as if their supply of movies would run short any time soon.

He allowed his mind to wander as he enjoyed the brisk early morning air. What had Misato and Ritsuko been doing last night?

>Probably having another drink-fest, which meant the apartment refrigerator would be mostly empty of all consumables, and only half full of beer. Or maybe a quarter full -it all hinged on how bad the week had been. His eyes spotted an ATM machine for the 53rd Bank of Tokyo-03, situated next to a 24-hour grocer. The beer he couldn't do much about, but food on the other hand...

Shinji stopped before the ATM and whipped out his Nerv ID card. Time to check his balance. He slipped his card into the proper slot, and waited for the screen to give him directions. Instead, a calm, mechanical voice asked, "Palm-print identification please."

He blinked, not expecting that, and touched his hand to the screen on the third repetition. The machine beeped agreeably, and a series of small green indicator lights began to light. It was about halfway through the check when Shinji remembered his infernal luck with machines. A fraction of a second after that realization, the indicator flashed red, the machine groaned in complaint, and started to shake like an off balance washing machine. Shinji snatched his hand away just as the machine pegged him on the head with his ID card, and then began to spin itself around, spraying five thousand yen notes like some deranged impulse sprinkler.

Shinji frowned mightily as he rubbed his sore noggin, and then stooped to retrieve his card, and a few of the bills. "God damn digital world. I'm gonna hav'ta learn how to keep from doing that.

>Stupid machines."<p>

'\-/'

> It was mid afternoon by the time Shinji got back to his apartment complex. The police had shown up while he was still making his food purchase, and the head Inspector, Zenigata, had been rather stubborn about the entire thing. It wasn't until he had pulled out his Nerv ID when they demanded his identification that they had given him any slack. It would seem that little piece of plastic could open doors.<p>

As the front door to his shared apartment opened, he idly wondered what his rank was. He stepped over the threshold, bagged food under one arm, and called out, "Honeys, I'm home!" to what he was sure was an empty house.

Instead, over the sound of the shower, he heard Misato's voice answer, "You're late! Ritsuko went off to work already, >there's some breakfast for you in the fridge -help yourself!"<p>

Shinji rose an eyebrow as his eyes followed the contours of the older

woman's body, partially obscured by the glass door of the shower.  
"Yeah, sorry about that..." He said as he dropped the groceries on the kitchenette counter, opened the fridge and nabbed the cold bowl of rice and other assorted breakfasts prepared for him and returned to his vantage point, "I'm gonna watch something, >okay?"<p>

"Feel free!" She returned, oblivious.

Shinji just sat down and watched appreciatively as he munched away contentedly. He had warned her of his habits, after all. Idly, he mused if he should offer her a washcloth as she got out. But he shook his head no, no that was far too clich  d. Far better to just offer her a towel and be done with it. Misato had a beautiful body; it would be worth the slap just to see it.

His other, other, OTHER sensei would have berated him at this point for not thinking of copping a feel. Shinji, however, >didn't like being that crass. And besides, it wasn't like he really needed any more Ki as it was. Misato broke him out of his thoughts with a question. "So, how'd it go? I mean, with your father and all -I know you two haven't seen each other in a long time. Was it too awkward?"<p>

Another thing he liked about Misato, he realized as he formulated his answer for that -she had a really nice voice. Not to mention that she seemed to be a caring, kind hearted sort, if perhaps a wee bit immature. But that last just meant there was less of a generation gap to hurdle, unlike with Ritsuko. Now, there was a hard to touch beauty! "Eh, it was alright. Seems Father's idea of 'Male Bonding' was to rent some really, really bad porn, but after that we watched a few regular movies. I didn't know Father had such a running wit."

"Oh? How so?"

"Well, he would sometimes just say really funny things at times that were wholly appropriate: old movie quotes, improv character chatter, the like. It actually made his presence tolerable. Might do it again sometime."

"Huh. Your dad, with a sense of humor? I would have never thought him capable..." Misato trailed off, giving her hair a good scrub.

Shinji jumped in with his own question. "What'd you and Ritsuko do? I noticed that the fridge is still mostly full of beer."

"We stayed in, watched a really bad porn, and then felt too miserable to really get drunk afterwards, so we just went to sleep.  
>Good thing for Ritsu -she was called in early this morning,<br>something to do with a manual override with Unit One. She didn't explain, but it sounded urgent."

Shinji's eyebrow twitched. Probably has something to do with Father's Joyride, he said to himself.

'\-/'

> "...can't just take an Evangelion out to 'Settle the Score'<br>with some punkass kid because he gave you bad porn!" Ritsuko screeched, in full rage. She had been livid about his use of Unit-01 to begin with

-having learned the reason why he had Shinji take the Evangelion out only served to fuel her anger, and her hot gaze battled fiercely with his cool demeanor. "It's like, like... Killing a fly with a bazooka! Sure, the effect is nice, but the property damage is overwhelming! Have you anything -ANYTHING!- to say for yourself? At all?"

Sadly, Gendou's icy veneer was loosing ground. Fuyutsuki, >standing semi-vigilant by his side, had entered full granite mode just to keep from laughing aloud minutes ago. Gendou managed to look a little sheepish. "I apologize."<p>

"You app... Appolo... Arrrrrugh! Is that all you have to say?" She demanded.

"I answer to no man," he said, his arctic gaze slipping fully back into place the moment she floundered. Behind the mask, he wondered what it was about her that made him even minutely vulnerable.

Her gaze hardened as well. "I see," was all she said, before turning briskly and exiting the office. The whole effect would have been more dramatic if she could have slammed the door. Sadly, one ton of flint steel is a wee bit more weight than a single diminutive blonde scientist can throw around.

After a long moment of silence, Fuyutsuki asked: "'I answer to no man'? What about Keel?"

"He isn't a man," Gendou said, his eyes sweeping over to his second in command, "...he's Cthulhu."

At that, Fuyutsuki did laugh.

'\-/'

> "How about you?" Shinji asked Misato, still watching her through the shower door, "Going in today?"<p>

"Yeah, later. I'm pulling the four to midnight shift tonight. You going to bother to go to school today at all?"

"Nah, prolly not," he replied lazily. "Missed half the day anyway. Missing the other half isn't going to hurt."

"You'll miss seeing Kizuko," She teased.

"Eh, I'll see her tomorrow," he shot back in a carefree,

>uncommitted tone.<p>

She just chuckled. "You playboy."

"What can I say -I like women. They're... enjoyable, in so many different ways."

She left it at that, and Shinji, through long years of practice, sensed she would soon be getting out of the shower. He sorted through plausible scenarios as he crept closer, silent as a cat, and settled on 'Koui Koi Toki Taoru', the 'Ill Timed Towel Courtesy'. Game plan: retrieve a towel and stay in position of doing so until she opened the shower door, at which point he would turn around, falsely startled, get a good look, and then yammer an apology and avert his

gaze like a gentleman. He nodded to himself as he stooped to get a towel from the cabinet under the sink. Should work.

He didn't have long to wait. A few moments later, the water turned off, and the stall door opened. He jumped slightly, and turned ever so slowly to look at her, like someone who was going about their business when something unexpected happened -like having the girl get out of the shower while you were still in the room.

>Shinji had his poker face on, a slightly started expression mixed with one part leer and two parts guilt. He was a master at it.<p>

Ah yes, the 'surprised, startled, unsure' look that would quickly turn to embarrassment or anger, droplets of water still rolling down her wonderfully round, full breasts, the ragged scar that passed through her cleavage diagonally where his head once rested briefly so many days ago, her thin waist and shapely hips narrowing to her-Scar?

Misato's lips tightened into a pensive frown as she saw Shinji's eyes stop their downward travel and rivet back to her chest, eyes widening as his look of guilty pleasure disappeared for one of honest surprise. She sighed, took the towel from his hand and wrapped it tightly around herself. "Done staring yet?"

"Not really, no. Could you take the towel off again? I didn't get past the hips-" A resounding crack filled the small room, "Ow! What!"

Misato shook her hand out, and reminded herself not to do that again, as her hand seemed to be in more pain than Shinji's cheek despite the angry red mark she had left there. "Bloody pervert."

"Yeah, well, I gave you fair warning. Not my fault you didn't catch on. Can I ask where you got the, ah...?" showing a bit of tact, Shinji motioned crossways on his own chest, managing to look a trifle embarrassed.

"Antarctica. Now get out so I can dry off," She said, >pointing at the door.<p>

He quickly exited while his mind puzzled out just why Misato had been in Antarctica, and just how one gets a scar from a place that no longer exists. It took him a minute to arrive to two conclusions: Either she had been there before the great ice continent had been nuked by one very irate messenger of god, or she had been there during said event; which was rather unlikely, all things considered. But, if she hadn't been there during 2nd Impact, >then how did she get such a bad scar? Such a wound had probably been very serious, perhaps even life-threatening at the time. And to even have been here, should would have had to been, what, ten or something?<p>

His subconscious gave him the equivalent of a glare for thinking of so many unanswerable questions, and proceeded to dump them into the 'worry about later' section of his brain. Misato would either tell him or she wouldn't. Until then, he wouldn't lose any sleep over it.

He hopped over the back of the couch, settled himself, and grabbed the remote. "Might as well watch a bit of TV before deciding what to

do today."

'\-/'

> For those that knew Misato, seeing her after-reaction to Shinji's peeping-tom routine would have surprised them. Most would have expected her to fly into a rage, demanding an apology. Others might have expected her to be so embarrassed that she would not have the capability of being around Shinji for a few days. A very select few would expect her to simply shrug it off, her normal flippant attitude applying even to this.<p>

It truth, she was simply standing before the mirror, her eyes locked on the reflection of her scar just as Shinji's had been minutes before. Yes, she was slightly embarrassed that the young man who shared her home had seen her nude. Yes, she was angry that he had taken advantage of the situation, but that was partially mollified by his previous admissions about himself and his warning -by which, though a double entendre, he had received permission.

No, what irked her was his reaction to her 'mark'. Normally when people saw it for the first time, they would attempt a reaction they felt would be acceptable. Ritsuko had simply cocked one delicate eyebrow and asked what had happened. Kaji's jaw had dropped while a look of remorse had entered his eyes. Her doctor had looked as if he had bitten into something sour, while her co-workers at the public baths would look slightly horrified and whisper amongst themselves with wild speculations.

(Gendou knew about it, but Gendou knew EVERYTHING anyway. Well, most everything. If he could reliably predict when the angels would next attack, Misato would probably have married him.)

She didn't know how to gauge Shinji's reaction. Surprise was definite, but that had seemed to be all, almost as if he were used to such things...

She shook herself, snapped her bra closed with an adroit twist of the wrists, and sighed. "I don't have time for this," she muttered, reaching for her blouse. So he saw me. So he saw my mark.  
>So he knows I danced a little closer with death than most and lived.<br>Big deal. I have responsibilities to attend at headquarters, and this kind of trivial introspection bullshit can wait for the weekend.

She buttoned the clasp of her skirt and checked her reflection. Picture perfect. Thus ready to conquer the world, Misato set out to do just that.

'\-/'

> Shinji was bored. Misato had emerged from the bathroom completely dressed, shrugged her coat on, dropped her beret on her head, and had left for her shift over two hours early with only a simple 'I'm going now.'

'Return safely', he had replied, but that had been over twenty minutes ago, and now he was, as stated previously, bored.  
>"Maybe I should have gone to school today after all..."<p>

Thinking of school brought to mind girls, which in turn reminded him of his little black book, and a certain promise of a Tokyo-03 tour

from one Ibuki Maya.

And suddenly, Shinji had something to do.

'\-/'

> Maya was lying in bed, half awake, as she had worked the 10pm - 6am shift last night, with another four hours of overtime doing debugging routines besides. Her unseeing eyes were staring out the window of her apartment within the GeoFront as her subconscious ruminated on how best to acquire one Akagi Ritsuko as a permanent body pillow.<p>

Said ruminations were cut short by the telephone. Startled, >her subconscious attempted to prod her super-conscious awake, but the woman's Ego was in the midst of a pleasant dream involving several dairy products and one dirty blonde, and was far too busy to be disturbed.<p>

So, Maya's subconscious screwed up its courage and answered the phone. "Ibuki."

"Ibuki Maya-san? This is Ikari Shinji," said the voice on the other end of the phone.

Ikari. The subconscious knew that name. It took a moment for the proper associations to present themselves for recognition, but then that was the Ego's job anyhow and the subconscious was only filling as a courtesy. "Yes, Pilot. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I was hoping you might be willing to show me the city this afternoon, if you're available. I have some free time and couldn't imagine a better way to spend it than in your company."

Maya's subconscious decided it liked this guy, the Ego be damned. "I would be delighted, Ikari-san. Can you meet me at entrance 3F of the GeoFront at Fourteen Hundred, Thirty Hours?"

"Two thirty PM?" he asked, then, "I'll be there. Later, >then, Ibuki-san."<p>

Maya hung up the phone and forcibly prodded her super->conscious awake while she went through the motions of getting dressed. She was about halfway through buttoning her blouse when her Ego finally realized what was going on, just what she had agreed to,<br>and also that she was humming softly and had a big grin on her face.>The smile was the first to go.<p>

A small group of scrub jays, imported into the GeoFront to help keep the insect population down, took off suddenly -startled, >no doubt, by one Ibuki Maya, age 20, venting her anger rather vocally to one snickering subconscious.<p>

It didn't help.

'\-/'

> 2:20 pm found Maya not quite dressed to the nines, but begrudgingly at GeoFront gate 3F, eyeing one Ikari Shinji as if he were the carrier of some plague. She was still mildly angry with her subconscious for 'setting her up', but Maya wasn't one to be breaking

promises, even those made without her full consent.<p>

Which still irked her. That her subconscious was still snickering faintly was of no great help to her mood. "Ready to go?"

Shinji in turn was giving Maya a skeptical look, as if to say 'if you didn't want to go, you could have mentioned it sooner.

>He was, in fact, thinking this as he said, "Only if you're still up for it, Maya-san. I don't want to be a burden."<p>

She sighed. "Shinji-kun... I'll be honest with you. I wasn't fully awake at the time you called, so I'm a bit disgruntled that I agreed to go on a date with you at all."

He blinked. "A date? Who said anything about a date?"

"Pardon?"

"I just wanted someone to show me around today. You know:

>book stores, library, parks, arcades, places to eat, local hangouts,<br>that sort of thing. If I had wanted a date, I would have said,

>'Would you like to go on a date with me?' not 'Would you mind showing me around town?'"<p>

"You mean to tell me you make a distinction between the two?"

"I'm an Ikari," he shrugged, "As half-truths and mind games are our specialty, distinctions are always important."

'\-/'

> "Sir!" Announced the short, stocky, and balding business suit-clad security man as he entered the office of the High Commander, "We have found the person you requested."<p>

Gendou's smirk turned sharkish, causing the S3 division commander's eyes to widen behind his dark sunglasses. "Bring him in, >if you would, Mister Garibaldi."<p>

"Sir!" He said, then Sub-vocalized a command into a throat mike. Not a moment later, two more division S3 security goons came in, carrying a squirming sack between them into Gendou's Office.

>Behind Gendou, Fuyutsuki's eyes widened as well.<p>

"Gendou, tell me you didn't..."

The old professor's only answer was that same smile that had paled the stalwart S3 section chief. Fuyutsuki, in contrast, only blanched slightly.

The two goons opened the sack and deposited one scrawny,

>geeky looking fellow, who was peering about as if he had been denied his spectacles. It was quite obvious the man was scared out of his wits, and he was shaking uncontrollably. Gendou strode forward and ripped off the duct tape covering the man's mouth, causing him to yelp in pain. Immediately he began stammering questions.<p>

"Where am I? Who are you people? What do you want? Why have you taken me? Is it money? Do you need money? I can giv-"

Gendou backhanded him with a DVD case. The result was far more noisy than painful, but the man shut up afterwards as Gendou tossed the box to the ground before him. It seemed to all the man had gone from being simply scared to absolutely puzzled.

"Is. This. Yours?" Gendou ground out the question, obviously knowing the answer but wishing to hear the man condemn himself.

"My masterpiece! Where did you find it! So rare, it is! Why, >it's the best porn ever produced by Virtuo Studios! That's my baby"<br>The man continued to yammer on about how it was, invariably, the best pornographic film ever produced by man, and how the ardent Angels would weep at the sight of it.

Privately, Gendou had to agree; any Angel would inevitably break into tears at the sight of it... tears of anguish.

He motioned to the two goons, and they nodded, and prepared to do what goons did best. Yet, as they made to draw their firearms,

>Gendou held up a hand. "Do it elsewhere, I don't want blood on my Sephiroth."<p>

The goons nodded, pistol whipped the man into unconsciousness, re-sacked him, and carried him out. After a shrug and a 'what a waste of my time' gesture, Garibaldi followed.

This left Fuyutsuki alone with Gendou and the DVD. Slowly, >the old professor stooped to retrieve the box, and eyed it critically. "You're having a man shot for... making bad porn?"<p>

"Consider it a mercy killing, if you will."

"Mercy? For who?"

"Me," Gendou said simply.

Fuyutsuki sighed, shaking his head. "I swear, Ikari, ever since you tracked down that Subaru engineer who designed the engine compartment for the 1983 GL station wagon, you've been incorrigible."

"Oh? What was so wrong about that?" Gendou asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Other than you cutting his left arm off and flogging him with it? Nothing. Nothing at all," Kozo replied blithely.

'\-/'

> "I wonder where de new guy is..." Touji muttered aloud, just before tearing into his lunch purchase. "I mean," chew, swallow "s'not like one of dem alien things is attakin' or nothin'."<p>

"Angels," Kensuuke muttered, flipping through the pages of 'Military Fan!' magazine, "They've been formally classified as 'Angels', though 'Shito' was also under consideration, I understand."

It was lunchtime at ShinSeki High School, and the two boys were in their homeroom with the rest of their classmates who had either brought a lunch with them or had nothing else better to do than stick



around and wait for class to resume.

"Uh, okay." Touji shrugged off the excess information like a duck does water, "Still, where is dat guy? 'E should be 'ere, s'not like he can jus' skip class whenever 'e feels like."

"Technically, he can."

"Say WHAT?" Touji was eyed, briefly, by the entire body of students still in the classroom upon his outburst. He glared at them until their attention turned elsewhere. Well, almost everyone -Touji's glare did nothing to Kizuko, who hadn't stopped looking out the window. "Ya mean 'e can jus' not show?" he whispered, albeit loudly.

"Pretty much. Since we're effectively under Martial Law at this point, Ikari's status as a Nerv Pilot gives him immunity from civilian laws and punishment for such." Kensuuke explained.

Touji looked blank. "Say again, in Nipponese, doc."

Kensuuke sighed. "He could kill someone and not get in trouble, if he could justify it."

"Oh. Cool. Think we could get 'im to off Kurasawa-sensei?"

"No."

"Oh. Damn." Touji sighed, and quickly finished his meal.  
>After another moment, he asked again, "So, where is 'e?"<p>

"How many times do I have to tell you 'I don't know' before it sinks in, Touji? If you're so interested, why don't you ask Ayanami?"

Touji swiveled his gaze to look at the blue haired girl. In response, Kizuko turned to look directly at him. She always did that. It weirded him out. "Hell no. You ask 'er. She freaks me out,

>man."<p>

Deep into an article about the U.S.S Over The Rainbow's new mission in the Pacific, Kensuuke's wit had an unexpected and perfectly opportune chance to exert itself. "What? Touji, Mr. Macho,  
>THE all out bad-ass, rising young star of the high school basketball team, age 17, scared of a mere slip of a girl?"<p>

Touji's gaze backtracked just as slowly to lock onto Kensuuke, who suddenly realized he might have gone too far by dint of the bayonets Touji's eyes had affixed in preparation to gut him.  
>"Uh, heheh... Yeah, she scares me too."<p>

Touji let it drop. "Man, I dunno which'd be worse -Ayanami,  
>or the exact opposite of Ayanami."<p>

"Inverse Ayanami?" Kensuuke looked up from his magazine,  
>suddenly interested in the conversation, "What would that be?"<p>

"umh... A girl, uh, fiery like, real rambunctious, vulgar, >rude, athletic, with big boobs, and uh... No bandages." Touji thought a moment, then added, "She'd have'ta be foreign, too."<p>

"I'm not sure, Touji -that sounds kinda hot to me."

"Youse right, Ken. I think I jus' painted da picture of mah dream girl! Gonna have ta get me onena those."

'\-/'

>Somewhere in Germany...<p>

Asuka Shoryu-Langly stopped in mid-word on her forty-page report for advanced Japanese, shuddering. She quickly saved the document before casting her lovely blue eyes about her room for something warmer than her current loose tank top and short-shorts to wear. While not highly susceptible to catching cold quickly, she felt as if someone had just walked over her grave -her stomach seemed suddenly interested in a butterfly collection, and her nerves seemed to have decided buck was the shot for the day.

All in all her night had just gone from bad to worse.

Swearing in German, then English, with a follow through of Japanese for good measure, she wrapped the bed's comforter about herself and decided to wait this sudden bout of anxiety out. Perhaps she was enduring too much strain, as of late. Maybe just a wee bit too much stress trying to balance Martial Arts classes, Ballet, >Piano Lessons, Fencing, Evangelion Synch Tests, Combat Training,<br>Tutoring, and all, while attempting to get that second BA in Japanese.

Staring wistfully at the computer, she shut down the word processor and then deleted the file she had worked so hard on up to this point. Screw that second BA, she was only aiming to get it as a way to pass the time and learn a few thousand more Kanji. She snorted softly to herself as she began to calm a bit. Like hell was she -she!-- Asuka Shoryu-Langly ever going to set foot in Japan anyway! Ha! The entire idea was laughable.

"In the morning I am going to call the University and drop this silly class. I am through with running myself into the ground. >I shall never really have an opportunity to use this language as it is, so I will simply stop now and cut my losses." As she finally settled down, she decided to do just that.<p>

Big mistakes are often made for small reasons.

'\-/'

> Shamshiel was NOT a 'happy Angel'. Far from it.<p>

I will build for you a body which will make your enemies quail in fear. Shamshiel repeated the GOD's words in a mocking mental tone as he eyed the reflection of his purple behemoth self in the blue ocean waters below. Bah. 'Light of Day' they called me. >'Mighty Sun of God' they once acclaimed. No more! Now it's gonna be 'Shamshiel the Phallus!', 'Shamshiel Johnson!', or, more likely than not, 'Mr. Loe Wang'. Thanks a Lot, GOD.<p>

So grumped the former ruler of the fourth heaven and prince of paradise as he flew over the calm waters of the pacific en route to Japan. Hell! Even pulling guard duty on the Garden of Eden was better than this... this... effrontery! This is even worse than when I had to give that Moses guy the grand tour of heaven! My honor is impugned! Who did Hilkihah give the treasures of David and Solomon too? Me! That's who! ME! And for all my repute, all my laud and honor, I receive this? HA! I should lose on general principle!

A lightning bolt flew out of the clear sky, falling squarely upon the irritated Angel. Crack-Zapp! Ow. Okay, maybe not.

And lo! For the heavens did rumble ominously, spitting further electrical might upon the hapless Angel of GOD. Crickty-

>Crack-Zapperfical-Zappity-Zapp Son of a mythos! Fine! I get it.<br>Go, beat the guardian, get Adam, and be back before dinner. Yes MOM.

KRAKATOA-OLYMPIAN-JOLT

Eeeeyow!

'\-/'

> Within the familiar confines of Nerv headquarters, Misato sighed. It was one of those days, Shinji's earlier stunt notwithstanding. She was currently dodging the stack of paperwork on her desk by pleading more important business on the command deck,<br>but in truth there was nothing there which really needed her direct supervision, and she suspected the bureaucracy knew this as well but was too busy to mention it. Thus the sigh, as she loathed paperwork with a passion. "Maybe I should hire an Aide de Camp..." she muttered to herself.

Ritsuko caught the mutter from where she was lounging in Maya's usual chair. She too was dodging work, more because of sheer exasperation than anything else, Gendou's earlier stunt notwithstanding. The R&D team was currently in the process of manually checking Evangelion Unit-01 for any minor damage the computer diagnostic was unable to locate, and they wanted her on hand in case they found any more large, unexplainable bolts. She too sighed. "It's one of those days, isn't it?"

"Yep. Makes you wish you hadn't gotten up this morning, >don't it?" Misato returned.<p>

"Yes. Almost feels as if today was simply set aside for everything to go wrong, doesn't it?"

"Yep. Proverbial fecal matter hitting the ancient oscillating impeller system, and us catching the splatter, right?"

Matoko and Aoba looked at each other, a single eyebrow raising on both, as they turned their gaze on the two women who continued to run down the list of ominous tidings. They knew how it had to end.

"Only one way to top this shit list." Misato grumbled.

"Indeed. Only one single event could possibly make this day any worse than it already has been."

The Magi, complacent with their number-crunching, suddenly took stock of an unprecedented series of ionic discharges detected off the eastern coast of Japan. They conferred between themselves, >and unanimously decided, if not the cause, what lay in that area.<br>They sent this datum to the consoles of Hyuuga, Shigeru, and Ibuki, >uncaring that Ibuki was not present.<p>

Aoba and Makoto switched their focal point from the two women to their consoles as the Pattern: Orange light flared prominently, and sighed. Misato and Ritsuko, too, noticed this, and also sighed, although theirs decidedly more resigned than the techs.

"Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio..." Ritsuko muttered.

"Oh, Fuck Me," Misato summed up in layman.

"Code Orange, Ma'am. Sound General Alert?" Makoto asked redundantly.

"Yes, sound the General Alert and notify the cages, have Unit One ready for sortie, STAT." Misato said, with as much restraint as she could muster.

"You can't," Ritsuko said, tiredly. "Unit One's currently under manual diagnostic. Won't be ready for hours."

"Shit. Belay that order, make Unit Zero ready for sortie, >STAT, and pray. Magi!" Misato barked to the computers, "Overlay map of Japan with location of the Fourth Angel."<p>

The computers promptly did so, a bright red dot off the coast of Japan with a line connecting it with 'ANGEL' in orange as a descriptor. They also included a handy red line indicating the Angel's path towards Tokyo-3, and the estimated time of arrival. A little over thirty minutes.

"Shit-Shit. Magi, display locations of Pilots."

The map zoomed in, until Tokyo-3 was visible, and three lines appeared labeled Kizuko, Rei, and Shinji; Kizuko's line was moving towards HQ from school, Rei's was projected within the Geofront, as expected, and Shinji's...

Shinji's line was in the town outskirts, on a direct intercept course with the Angel's projected angle of attack.

"Oh. Fuck. Me." Misato repeated. "Magi, alert Pilot Ikari of his impending doom."

"Please define 'Impending Doom'." The Magi asked calmly.

Before Misato could yell at the innocent machine, Ritsuko answered, "Alert pilot Ikari as to the current situation, ETA of the Forth Angel, and that he is currently in the Fourth Angel's flight path to Tokyo-Three."

"Compliance." Said the Magi, then: "Error."

"Error? What Error!" Misato shouted.

"Pilot Ikari's communication device is currently malfunctioning due to his higher than average capacity for storing human energies."

"Which means...?" Misato queried.

The computer emitted something very close to a sigh. "His cell phone 'got zapped' by his Ki, Captain."

Ritsuko gave the computer a blank look and asked it incredulously, "Do you mean to tell me you can measure his Ki?"

"The current definition of Ki is insufficient for scientific measure, but the term is viewed as an appropriately analogous theoretical idea by two votes of three. Yes, Director, Ki is similar to the energies radiated by an AT Field, thus rendering the emanations detectable by the same systems used to measure AT Field strength."

Ritsuko was astonished. "But what about...? No. Magi, make a note: Remind me of this in two days."

"Noted, Director. It will be pleasant to continue this conversation with you at that time."

"If we live through this attack, you mean." Misato muttered.

"Of course, Captain. One should infer that to be obvious"  
>replied the Magi.<p>

"Oh be quiet." She snapped, then amended, "Until we need you again, or you have something relevant to say."

"Compliance."

Misato huffed, and glared at the map while Ritsuko snickered weakly. "What the hell is Shinji doing out there?"

'\-/'

> "See? Isn't this nice?" Maya asked, as Shinji pulled the Vespa he had purchased into a parking spot in the large park outside of town.<p>

That he had even bought the little black moped had surprised her. They had been passing by a Vespa Boutique when she had started to get a little tired from all the walking they had done. Shinji had noticed and promptly disappeared inside, emerging not five minutes later with the sleek little black and grey two-tone motor scooter, a pair of helmets, and a set of goggles for himself. After that, they had ridden to several places, and Maya had discovered Shinji was a lot firmer than he looked, muscle wise.

But he's still comfy to lean against... Maya thought happily, placing her helmet on the seat next to Shinji's as they got off the bike to stretch and walk the park grounds a bit. She blinked, reassessed that statement, and mentally sighed, ...for a guy. Which he is, by the way. Did you forget?'

Oh shut up and enjoy yourself, you ninny, replied the subconscious to

the Ego, When was the last time you've had this much fun?

Well, there was the other day when Ritsuk-

That DOESN'T involve Doctor Akagi, cut in the Subconscious, whom we shall further refer to as Su-chan, annoyed.

"ummnn..." Maya said aloud, unaware she had spoken. Not for a while, I admit.

Shinji looked at her askance, but said nothing, chalking it up to the internal debate that had been going on since he had met up with her today. It was kind of odd really, but she had shown him several very interesting places he planned on returning too, and she did pay attention to him when he was speaking to her, so he let it slide. Who knows, he said to himself, ...maybe she's trying to convince herself to sleep with me? Another sideways glance at the young woman in question, before he rolled his eyes and gave a quiet snort of derision. Yeah, right. In your dreams, Ikari.

...we should roll him! emphasized Su-chan, pulling up a few graphic fantasies of this to illustrate her point, Pillow him, >have a good tumble, do the beast with two backs! I mean, c'mon, when was the last time you had a good lay?<p>

"Shut up, shut up, shut up Shut Up SHUT UP! I am not going to fuck Shinji!" She yelled, attracting the attention of several passers by as well as said Ikari. "Oh, shit."

Well, now you've done it, said Su-chan bitterly. Never even get the chance now.

At first Shinji was surprised, having his idle musings affirmed in such a manner. Then he was a bit disappointed, because he was quite convinced Maya would be a wonderful lay. Finally he settled on indignant anger. "Ibuki-sama," he said quietly, "...how many times must I emphasize to you I do not consider this outing a date?"

Oh shit. 'Ibuki-sama'? He's mad. He's very mad. Maya covered her mouth with her hand as her eyes darted from his face to his eyes to his frown in a seemingly endless cycle of mute witness to his calm anger. "Oh, Shinji, I... I mean... Oh, I don't know what I mean. I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For..." Maya trailed off as a beautiful platinum blonde American girl walked by, wearing little more than a bikini in the warm April weather, her breasts bouncing agreeably. Impossible! >Those are... Are... Perfect! I mean, whoa! I want... Maya finished her mental outburst with a whine.<p>

Shinji, for his part, had noticed her too, but had focused back on Maya after a brief glance, preferring a smaller breasted woman himself. In doing so, he could see Maya's attention was still fixed on the foreign girl, and her eyes had that semi-glazed look Touji got whenever he and Kensuuke watched the girls in their swimming suits during P.E. It was the same look his Other-Other- >OTHER sensei got whenever he thought of going on a panty raid. Or going to the beach. Or the mall. Or a walk in the park.

Or...<p>

Shaking his mind out of a list that was well nigh endless,  
>Shinji reevaluated Maya, and several things clicked into place. She talks about Ritsuko all the time. She never mentions anything about guys at all. She took me to places I enjoyed. She looks at girls the same way I do. She's a Lesbian... who wants to lay me. ... ?<br> At that point, Shinji fell over laughing.

Maya blinked out of her stupor and looked at Shinji incredulously.  
"What? What? What's so funny?"

It took a moment for Shinji to calm down enough to try to speak, but the effort of not laughing through what he wanted to say just sent him back to laughing again, clutching his sides and rolling a bit from side to side on the grass. Maya 'Mou'ed in exasperation, crossed her arms, and waited.

It took a while. A long while. At the end of which, she was even mildly amused at his behavior. He was panting now, every other breath leaving in chuckles as he laid on the grass, staring unseeing at the blue sky. "Oh, oh! I hurt all... Over..."

"You ready to tell me what's so funny now?"

"yeah... Sure..." He wheezed, "What's funny... is you.  
>Miss Contradiction-In-Terms."<p>

"What do you mean...?" Maya asked, puzzled.

"You, who are... Obviously attracted to girls... debating the merits of... having sex... with me. Who is most definitely.  
>not a girl. In the slightest." The thought sent him to snickering again, albeit softly, as he really did hurt from all the laughing he had done.<p>

Maya's thoughts ground to a halt. She blink-blinked (Squeegie-Squeegie). She sighed, and sat down next to Shinji's prone form. And then she laughed as well, not nearly as hard as Shinji had, but with a fair amount of humor nonetheless. After she was through laughing, she drew her knees to her chest, wrapping her arms about them and asked quietly, "How'd you figure it out? That I like girls, I mean."

"It wasn't until you oogled the foreigner that I knew for sure, but your attitude on this afternoon's outing was a big tip off."

"You're not mad?" She asked after a moment.

"Me? No, no... Why would I be? I can understand your attitude towards this 'date' now, and I'm not angry at all. Honored,  
>I should say, that you seem to like me enough that part of you is entertaining the idea of 'entertaining' me."<p>

"Oh, that was horrible." Maya groused, eyeing Shinji. "You can't pun at all."

"I know. I shouldn't even try." He admitted, sheepishly. "I mean, I'm good at lots of physical things, but I can't pun to save my life."

" 'Lots of physical things', huh? Does that include sex?"

Shinji shook his head. "No, I haven't yet. I'd love too, but truth be told, I haven't found the time, or the proper partner.  
>Until I came to Tokyo-Three, I was training in Martial Arts, day in,<br>day out. Doesn't leave much time for play."

"And now?" Maya asked, glancing at the sky of blue.

"Now I have the time, and plenty of willing girls... but I still haven't found the girl, yet. I hope I do, before I save the world... after that it'll be kind of hard to find her, celebrity status and all."

"When you save the world? Not if? You sound pretty confident."

"Of course I am. Be pointless to try if I didn't think I could do it. I'd be endangering everybody if that were the case."

"So what are you looking for?"

"In a girl? I don't know, but I have the feeling I'll know it when I see it."

"Anyone give you a good feeling yet?"

"Now that, is a secret." He said, smiling. "But seriously, I think, maybe, yes."

"Can I ask who?" Maya asked, curious.

"Well, there's this thing between me and Rei that I don't quite get. It's like, I dunno... Like I met her in a past life or something, you know? I get the same feeling from Kizuko, too... but not as strongly. I like them both, even though I've only been here for a few weeks now, and one or the other might be who I'm looking for. Only time will tell."

"Rei is cute, and she seems like a nice girl. But Kizuko.  
>I don't know, there's just something cold and mysterious about her... you know?"<p>

"Yeah. I've noticed. Ritsuko called it an 'ice veneer' once.  
>But that's kinda what it is, she's holed herself up inside and doesn't let anyone in to see the real her."<p>

"She works with your dad and Ritsuko in a lot of experimental stuff with the Eva's, and from what I hear she was deeply involved in the early stages of the program. Maybe something happened with the Eva's to make her act like this?" Maya wondered aloud.

Shinji shuddered slightly, remembering his spat with Unit-  
>00. Oh yeah. Something happened alright, the Eva said 'I will eat your soul, for it is crunchy and tastes good with ketchup'. That thought led to another, Hey, wait... if Kizuko's soul is in Unit Zero, then wouldn't a soul be in Unit One, too? But whose? Not Rei's, she's more or less normal, and I haven't seen anyone other than Father acting like Kizuko, and if his soul was in there, I think I'd know about it...<p>



"You look wrapped in thought." Maya asked, bringing Shinji back to reality.

"Oh, sorry. Yeah, my brain ran off with me for a minute. Do you happen to know who did the first Synch test with Unit One"  
>Shinji asked in return.<p>

"No, sorry. I was only hired about a year and a half ago, so I wasn't here when they did Unit One's initial synch testing. I would assume it was Rei, though. Why?"

"Eh, just curious, is all." He replied, shrugging, and then sprung his body off the ground to sit next to Maya in Suri Waza.  
>Maya had barely seen him move.<p>

"Wow. And you just call yourself a martial artist?"

"Yep. Humble folk, we serious martial artists. All the floozies take titles like 'Grand Master of Such and Such style' or 'Supreme Kai' or 'Grand Dragon' or... well, the list goes on for a while. Anyone who knows anything about martial arts knows the more humble the artist, the better he is. Usually. Although it's fun to go and beat up floozies on occasion, sometimes the floozy is pretty good."

"I can only imagine. Do you practice often?"

"Recently, I haven't had much time to practice. Been too busy at school and at headquarters doing tests. Besides that, I really need a good sparring partner to keep in top form, and frankly there just isn't a martial artist in the area that's good enough for that. I mean, I'd end up either hurting them or simply dodging their attacks and piss them off, so... I'm going to hold off a bit until I can find someone to train with. I don't like it, but... There's not much to be done about it."

"You know, I heard that the German Pilot is a good martial artist. Been practicing since she was four, I think that's what Misato said. She's about your age now, I think. She's supposed to be transferred here from Nerv-G after Unit Two is completed. Maybe she'd be good enough to train with...?"

Shinji gave it some thought. "Maybe... depends on her temperament and her instructors. If she's been sticking with it and constantly pushing her Sensei to teach her more and more, she might just be at a level where I could shape her into a good sparring partner. It all depends, but I certainly hope so."

\-/'

>Somewhere in Germany...<p>

Asuka sat bolt upright in bed, jolted awake so quickly the motion almost made her ill. If the evening's earlier case of nerves had bothered her, it was pale in comparison to this! Had the last cause of this feeling been someone merely walking over her grave,  
>this recent attack was someone exhuming her coffin, cutting her cold lifeless body into small pieces, and then feeding said pieces to swine.<p>

"What the hell is going on?" She asked herself as the feelings of

dread, anxiety --was that hopelessness?-- slowly faded from her system, leaving the poor girl shuddering with her arms wrapped protectively about herself. Surely I'm not that bad off! Am I losing my mind, or...? She sneezed. Maybe It's just a cold? That must be it. Surely! Just a cold, or maybe a touch of the flu. Yes.  
>Of course. Bloody pervasive virii. I shall make a visit to the physician on staff at Headquarters first thing tomorrow morning!<p>

And with that, Asuka promptly fell back into her soft bed and spent the next few hours staring at the ceiling, unable to sleep.

I don't want to lose my mind, like... Like...

"...momma..."

\-/'

> Misato was pacing back and forth on the command deck,<br>puzzling out just how they were going to get word to Shinji. Sending a runner would take too long. He wasn't in the city proper so he wouldn't hear the general alert for civilians to take shelter. His cell phone was dead, and he had nothing else on him they could use...

The Angel kept coming, The Pattern: Orange had been confirmed as Pattern: Blue, and time was slipping by. They had little more than fifteen minutes to get Shinji back in time to pilot Unit-00.  
"Shit."

Gendou strode in with the impeccable calm he always seemed to exert. "Status?" he asked quietly.

"Sir, Angel is confirmed, at fourteen minutes, fifty five seconds out from Tokyo-Three, mark." Reported Hyuuga.

Shigeru spoke up from his console, forced to do real work since Maya wasn't around. "Unit Zero is ready for sortie with Pilot Ikari, but we have yet to contact the pilot and alert him to the threat."

"And why not?" asked the High Commander of Nerv.

"His Ki zapped his cell phone," Misato explained as she stopped pacing to turn and face the Commander. "So we can't contact him that way. He's outside the city, off in Noyon Koen, reason unknown, right in the path of the Fourth Angel, who isn't slowing down in the slightest."

"His... Ki?" Gendou asked, confused, before something else Aoba had said finally registered. "Unit Zero? Why is Unit Zero readied for Sortie?"

"Unit One is still undergoing required manual diagnostic due to your earlier use of it, sir," Ritsuko said tiredly from Ibuki's console chair.

"I see," was all Gendou said to that. "However, Unit Zero..." Gendou trailed off, staring hard at the diagram in the main display.

"It will not pose a problem," said a new voice, much to the surprise of all. Kizuko spoke again as she came to stand next to Misato, matching gazes with Gendou. "He has received permission."

>Ikari's use of Unit Zero will not pose a problem."<p>

"Indeed. Continue, Captain Katsuragi."

"As I was saying, we haven't found a way of contacting Shinji yet, and until he gets here, we're fucked."

"Katsuragi-san, your language is something quite atrocious"

>Kizuko said, looking at the Captain quizzically.<p>

"Well, excuse me for not being in a supercalifragelisticexpialadous mood today, Miss Poppins. What the hell are you doing here, anyway?" Misato returned, glaring at the injured girl. "You're not combat ready, you should be as far from ground zero as possible."

"Incorrect, Katsuragi-san. As a Pilot Major in the Nerv Angel Response Team, it is my duty to be here at all times of crisis. As to how I was notified," She held up her cell phone, and gave it the same quizzical look she had bestowed on Misato, "The Magi informed me of my 'Impending Doom', stating an Angel had been observed and was currently en route to Tokyo-Three in minus twenty eight minutes, and that I was not in its flight path. I discerned from this information that I was needed here at Nerv."

"'Impending Doom?' You're kidding me..." Ritsuko glanced at the Magi's housings below. "Magi, define 'Impending Doom'."

"When the command to notify pilots of Impending Doom is received, the Magi are to contact all Pilots, notify them of the current status, the Angel's Estimated Time of Arrival, and their current location in reference to the Angel's Angle of Attack, or flight path." Said the Magi. "Do you wish to edit this command?"

"At a later date." Ritsuko sighed. "Good Job, Misato."

"How the hell was I supposed to know the bloody computer would do that? Besides, you're the one who told it what to do, so it's really your fault," Misato returned, then said, "Magi, inform Ibuki, Maya, of Impending Doom."

"Compliance." Then: "Error."

"Oh God, what is it NOW?" Misato grumbled.

"Ibuki, Maya's communication device is currently malfunctioning due to contact with Pilot Ikari's Ki." Clarified the Magi.

"His... Ki?" Kizuko asked.

"What the hell is Maya doing with Shinji?" Ritsuko demanded,

>staring in bewilderment as a line marked 'Ibuki' sprang up next to Shinji's own on the big map. "That... That... That Damn Kid! Not only is he going to get his own fool self killed, but my protÃ©gÃ© too! Damn it!"<p>

"Magi, withdraw the armored buildings into the GeoFront"

>Kizuko stated.<p>

"Unable to acquiesce to your request, Pilot. Minimum clearance level of Indigo needed for personnel to lower armored buildings."

"What? Why do you want to do that, Ayanami?" Misato asked,  
>only to watch as Ritsuko sprang to her feet.<p>

"Do it! Withdraw the buildings into the GeoFront, GOD speed!" The blonde scientist ordered, looking to Kizuko, "Brilliant,

>absolutely brilliant! Shinji can't help but notice the buildings lowering, and he'll know something serious is going on!" She ran over to Kizuko and hoisted the young girl up in her arms from behind, swinging her back and forth slightly as she exclaimed,<br>"You're such a good girl!"

Kizuko made a small sound of shocked protest, but seeing as the scientist wasn't in any hurry to put her down, she shrugged slightly, "Of course, Director."

Ritsuko gently lowered the girl back to the ground, and looked a bit abashed. "Err.. Sorry. Carried away by the excitement and all."

"Understood."

"Launch Unit Zero, immediately. Use whichever launch rail you need to get the Evangelion as close to Shinji's position as possible. And have that Progressive Katana strapped to the platform,  
>he'll need it." Gendou ordered. "If the buildings being lowered does not convey the proper message, seeing the Evangelion will." Gendou did not voice the I hope he was thinking, and turned to Fuyutsuki,<br>whom had just arrived. "You're late, Professor," he accused in a stage whisper.

"Yes, well..." Kozo replied in the same low tone, "I'm not as spry as I once was, you know. This place is huge. Besides, I was... busy with something."

Gendou gave him a harsh glance. "You weren't hitting on the Ensigns again, were you?"

"Ahem Of course not. Just making polite conversation, you understand."

"Oh, I understand. I understand perfectly."

Fuyutsuki sighed. "Just shut up and watch the monitor."

\-/'

> "Say, what's with the buildings?" Shinji asked Maya,<br>watching said buildings sinking into the ground from a vista point over looking Tokyo-3. "They're, um... sinking?"

"Sinking?" She asked, then took a look for herself. "That's odd."

"What?"

"Well, procedure states that the buildings are only to be lowered in event of an imminent attack..." Maya turned to look at Shinji. "You

don't think...?"

"No way. Maybe it's just a drill... or something..."

The both turned to look at Tokyo-3 again as the tall form of Unit-00 suddenly appeared, head snapping to attention after the sudden stop... and remaining there, scant kilometers away, final locks still engaged.

"Oh shit." Maya and Shinji chorused, staring at the Evangelion for a moment before they turned as one and ran for the Vespa. Shinji arrived first, donning his helmet and goggles, still fresh as Maya, winded, grabbed her helmet as he started the bike with a kick and revved the throttle. She dropped behind him and held on tight as the young man peeled out noisily, heading them straight towards the Eva.

One problem -there was a mountainside between them and it, >down hill and moderately forested. Taking any form of motorized transportation down the 40-degree grade looked like an excellent way to die, from Maya's perspective.<p>

Shinji, student of the Anything Goes Extreme Martial Arts Bicycle Combat Champion Shampoo, didn't seem to agree. "Hold on" >was all he said before opening the throttle to full and plunging them down the mountain.<p>

"I don't wanna die!" Maya shrieked, as she watched the surrounding trees blur by at a hundred and fifty kilometers an hour. >She shut her eyes, but quickly decided that motion without visual was even worse than staring her death in the face. Her eyes opened again in time to see them heading straight for a large tree,<br>seemingly set almost horizontal from the mountain face. "AH! Shin->JIIIIIII!"<p>

His response was to try and convince the bike to go faster as he used the tree's trunk as an impromptu ramp and continued along until they were falling with the bike in open air. "Now I'll never get to have Ritsuko!" She moaned, clinging to Shinji even tighter than before.

Shinji just rolled his eyes at the proclamation, and muttered "Oh ye of little faith..." before reaching behind himself to get a good grip on Maya. The Vespa's response to this shift of balance was to nose down even further, creating an even steeper angle of decent. Shinji just waited calmly, eyeing the distance between them, the Evangelion, and the ground.

Then, without warning, he jumped off the bike, taking Maya with him. She in turn screamed bloody murder. She continued on a bit, until she realized that the falling sensation had, mostly, >stopped. She dared to peek.<p>

They were still descending, all right, but, slower, straight for Unit-00's shoulder. "...we're... flying?" she asked.

"No. Just falling real slow. As opposed to falling real fast. Now, be quiet and think happy thoughts, Tinkerbell." Shinji commanded, focused entirely on getting to the Evangelion.

Maya complied, and found herself thinking thoughts of a blonde scientist and one courageously stupid brown-haired martial artist. He landed on Unit-00 a moment or two after that, and let go of her, sighing in exhaustion.

"Damn, that was hard. You're lighter than I thought, Maya. I coulda jumped a bit later and still gotten here. Well, better safe than sorry. Oh, wait... The Vespa!" He announced, quickly looking for it. After a moment, he espied it lodged in the boughs of a tree.

>"Well, of all the luck in the world! I could have sworn it'd be a total loss..."<p>

"Shinji..." Maya said, annoyed.

He turned towards her, his helmet in one hand as the other pulled his goggles down around his neck. "Huh?" Crack! "Oww!"

Maya shook her hand out and told herself to never do that again, it hurt too much. "Don't ever do that to me again! I thought I was gonna die!"

\-/'

> Everyone in the command deck had seen Shinji's prodigious leap, via the Eva's external sensors, and was amazed. Aoba was the first to speak up. "Dude! That kid's just like Goku from Dragonball!<br>Honest!"

"For once, I might agree with you, Shigeru." Makoto said, >shaking his head. "Unbelievable."<p>

"Magi... Connect me with Unit Zero's external speakers">Misato grumbled.<p>

"Connected, Captain."

"Are you two going to sit there all day, or are you going to kill the Angel? It's due in about five minutes, you realize."

"What?" Came Shinji's voice, "Oh. Hey Misato. Sure, but.>What am I to do with Maya, here?"<p>

"Oh, you're calling me Maya, now?" Came Maya's voice, still a trifle annoyed.

"Hey, we've been through a death-defying experience together, and now I'm about to save the world, again, so I think it's fine."

"Yeah, whatever. Go ahead, do what you want."

"Does that include...?"

"No!"

"Shut up and PILOT THE DAMN THING!" Misato yelled at them both. "Let Maya in the Entry Plug with you-"

"That is not advised." Gendou said quietly. "Unless..." He looked to Kizuko, who had remained on the command deck.

She returned his gaze, then shrugged. "Do as you wish."

Misato nodded. "Put Maya in the plug with you, and kill the damn thing."

\-/'

> Shinji shrugged, then headed towards the Entry Plug, Maya in tow. The plug ejected, hissed open, and Shinji jumped in, then extended a hand to Maya. She accepted, and was hoisted in as well.<br>Shinji stowed his and Maya's helmets behind the control chair, then took his place in it, and thumbed the button to close the hatch as Maya ducked in next to him.

"Where do you want me, and what should I do?" She asked.

He blinked at that. There were so many inappropriate replies he could give. "Umn..."

He was spared the choice by Ritsuko. "While sitting you in his lap is an option, Maya, it would only cause too much interference. Can you squeeze in behind Shinji?"

"Of course, Sempai." She said, as she did so. "Like this?"

"Perfect." Ritsuko said, then to Shinji, "If you hurt my ProtÃ©gÃ©, I'll have to kill you."

"Won't touch a hair on her pretty little head." He replied,

>pulling the center console up until it had a snug fit about them both. "This is going to suck if we get thrown about."<p>

"Why?" Asked Maya.

Shinji gestured to the controls. "These double as a restraint system, and it isn't meant for two people."

"Oh. Is that bad?"

"Only if you plan on surviving a short drop with a sudden stop." He replied absently. "Okay, Ritsuko, plug me in."

The shell of the Entry Plug performed a half rotation to the right, while the center console remained stationary. Below them, a small panel lit with an icon of Unit-00's face, and a scintillating display of colors washed over the displays as systems began to connect.

"Cool..." Maya breathed, ruffling Shinji's hair a bit,  
>"Does this always happen? It's like watching the Aurora Borealis..."<p>

"Yeah. Everything's just peachy until the LCL Flood. Oh, and when the floating nekkid chick shows up."

Maya blinked. "The... what?"

He didn't respond, even after nothing other than a normal linkup happened; though Shinji could have sworn he had heard a light, tittering laugh, and a soft caress on his left cheek.

>"Okay..." he said as the world seen through the single Cyclops eye of Unit-00 came into focus at last, "Where is it?"<p>

"Final safety locks disengage." Misato said over the comm.  
>"Good luck, you guys."<p>

"It looks bad, you two. There's noise in the Nerve Pulses.  
>Can you do anything to clear that up?" Ritsuko asked.<p>

Shinji looked to the comm. window, "Like what?"

"Proper synchronization requires you to be completely focused on one goal. With the two of you focusing on different things, this lowers the synch rate for every conflict of interest transmitted to the Nerve Pulses." Ritsuko explained.

"So that means what, exactly?"

Ritsuko sighed. "Maya, can you do us all a favor and think thoughts of death, murder, and destruction?"

"I don't think I have any, Sempai..." Maya said meekly.

"Magi, turn off the comm. for a minute, would you?" Shinji asked as he attempted to move the sluggish Unit-00, "I need to say something to Maya that I don't want overheard."

"And what the hell would that-" Ritsuko's angry shout was cut off as the Magi replied, "Communications silence enabled for sixty seconds. Do hurry, Pilot."

"What is it you want to say to me, Shinji?" Maya asked softly.

"You see that little blip on the screen marked Angel?" He asked in turn, nodding his head at it.

"Yeah."

"Right now, you're in the weapon designed to fight it. And if I can't get this thing to work right with you in it, you'll never get the chance to lay Ritsuko."

Maya growled at that. "And your point...?" She ground out.

Shinji moved the Evangelion's left arm a little smoother to point at the target, as yet unseen beyond the mountains. "If that Angel survives, you'll never, ever see Ritsuko again. Or your parents. Or your friends. Or anyone for that manner. For right now,  
>that Angel is the one single thing keeping you from Akagi." He said, noticing Maya's hands balling into fists next to him.<p>

She growled again, deeper, a more primal sound, and stated:  
>"It dies."<p>

Shinji could feel the control interference drop away to nearly normal levels, and smirked to himself before grabbing the Progressive Katana off the launch platform. "So it does."

\-/'

> "Do we have visuals on target?" Misato asked Hyuuga, who nodded in



return.<p>

"The ionic discharges the Magi detected around the Angel have continued unabated, causing interference with the long range scanners. The target is just coming into range of the grounded sensors... Now."

A large, floating purple phallus appeared on the Ubertron.  
>Three sets of eyes winced, and three eyebrows twitched in unison across the room. "The hell?" Misato voiced.<p>

"I don't fucking believe this..." Ritsuko moaned.

"Shinji, It Dies." Was all Gendou said.

"What?" Shinji asked over the comm., then spotted the Angel as it rose over the mountain range before him. "Oh, this soooooo figures. Does this mean my life is a bad porno flick?"

"I'd say no, considering you're still a virgin." Maya ground out angrily, before she realized the comm. was still on. "Ah, shit."

>Sorry Shinji."<p>

Shinji just growled lower and deeper than Maya had, and any fears he had harbored about moving the Evangelion vanished as his disgust, anger and hate flowed into the Nerve Pulses.

\-/'

> "Aww, man! They're doing it AGAIN!" Kensuuke bitched, almost tossing his precious camcorder to the ground.<p>

Touji and Kensuuke were, along with the rest of their classmates on campus when the General Warning was issued, currently in an underground shelter designated for the defense of civilians during Angel attacks. Like now. He looked to his friend and asked "What're they doin'?"

"See for yourself," Kensuuke griped, thrusting the camcorder/TV unit towards the older boy, "Nothing but text messages, >even NHK. Damn, but they never show us civilians anything!"<p>

"'At noon ta-day,'" Touji read off the screen aloud, "'...a state 'a emergency was declare-ed fer da Kanto district, Centerin' >'round da Tokai region. Stay tuned fer updates', huh? Youse right,<br>Ken -dat does suck. I wanted ta watch da game, though dat little Domo-kun figure hidin' under da desk is kinda cool."

"All you ever think about is basketball," Aida accused, then revised his statement, "Basketball and women."

"Yeah? So? Youse gots a problem wit dat? S' better dan getting off on dis military shit."

Kensuuke sighed. "Touji, you just don't understand. The power struggle! The fight for survival! The dominance over the foe! >The unrestricted use of full military might! The missiles! The bombs! The guns!"<p>

Touji sighed as he realized Kensuuke had the same look in his eyes

for this stuff that he himself reserved for girls. "Oh"  
>Kensuuke continued, "I've just got to see it with my own  
eyes!"<p>

Touji rolled his. "Aw, man, not dis crap again. You go out dere,  
you'll be killed, yo. All dead like."

"I don't care. Let's sneak out the back and watch!"

"Hell no."

"Oh, c'mon! Your sister would do it!" Kensuuke prodded.

"Leave Natsume outta dis. Da answer's still No." Touji said,

>crossing his arms in defiance of his friend's wishes.<p>

Kensuuke thought for a moment, then smiled. He had a plan. A  
dastardly, dastardly plan. "Touji, either you help me sneak out or  
I'll tell Ayanami Kizuko you've got the hots for her."

Touji's gaze turned flat. His head lolled back almost casually as he  
brought his expressionless visage to bear on Kensuuke. "You would not  
dare."

Kensuuke almost gave it up at that point. Touji's grammar was only  
good when either something serious happened or he was ready to lay  
down the serious whoop-ass. But his desire to observe the battle  
above won out over his common sense. "I would, and you know  
it."

Touji lurched to his feet slowly, his every movement a protest, as  
that same detached, lackluster gaze stared down from above Kensuuke  
like an avalanche does the weary mountain hiker.  
>"Move, or I swear I'll kill you myself."<p>

Kensuuke chuckled nervously, grabbed his camera bag, and started  
towards the exit at a brisk pace, Touji shadowing him every step of  
the way like a bad dream.

"I swear, Ken. If I die, I'm going to haunt you."

"Eh heh heh, heh heh..."

\-/'

> They exited the shelter via the manual emergency exit on the side  
of the mountain, and climbed the steps of an old temple, the likes of  
which were rare in this day and age, to gain access to an overlook.  
Kensuuke swung his camera back and forth, but...<p>

"Touji, I can't see anything! You?"

"Nah. Nothin' doin' Kensuuke." Indeed, the view was nice,  
>situated above Tokyo-3, and looking clear across the valley to the  
mountains on the other side. "Hey, wait... What's dat over dere, to  
da left a'dem big cell towers on da opposite side?"<p>

"What? Where? I don't see any-" Kensuuke stopped as he zoomed in near  
max, making out the shape of Unit-00. "There it is!  
>Over there! ...but, it's not moving."<p>

"Whaddaya mean it's not moving?" Touji asked, looking at Kensuuke like he was off his rocker. "Dey wouldn't jus' stick it out ta play statue, would dey?"

"I don't know, but..." Kensuuke zoomed in even further, and caught a glimpse of something small flying through the air towards the Evangelion. "The heck was that?"

"Was what?"

"I don't know, something small looked like it landed on the Eva, but I can't tell from this far away -my zoom's not good enough." Kensuuke explained.

"Yer zoom?"

"Yeah. It's only a hundred and fifty ex."

"I dunno what dat means, Ken."

Kensuuke flipped open the side screen and showed his friend the image. "It means that's as close as I can get in picture without getting closer to the action."

"Oh. Well, ferget dat. We ain't getting' any closer, you hear?"

"Sadly. Hey!" Kensuuke exclaimed as the Entry Plug was ejected, "I think that flying thing must've been some kind of one man transport for Shinji. Looks like he's getting into the Eva now."

"But, if da HQ fer Nerv is Unda-ground, and dat's where dey keep dem Eva things, den how come he's gotta get in top side?" Touji asked.

"Good question. Maybe he was somewhere else when they spotted the Angel?"

"S'good enough fer me. Why's it movin' so slow?"

"Hummn... maybe there's a problem with it?" Kensuuke asked rhetorically.

"Then why didn't dey use da other one, den? Everybody knows dey gots two of dem things!"

"Maybe it's even worse off than that one? Oh, wait, it's moving smoother now. Maybe the Evangelions just have a warm up period?"

"Like car engines or somethin'? Could be. Big pieces of machinery, dem giant robots."

"Yeah. That's probably what it was, looks fine now. Man, >that's a big sword."<p>

"Well, dey got's ta kill big things, don't dey? Wouldn't make much sense if 'e were ta go charging into a fight with a itty bitty knife or some-such." Touji crossed his arms and shook his head. "Dat'd be

kinda dumb, really."

"I hear they do use knives, as a holdout weapon only -keep one housed in those big blades on the shoulders of the other Eva Unit." Kensuuke said, watching as the Evangelion readied itself.

"Yeah? Well, I guess if yer inna pinch, a tooth pick's better den nothin'. What's in da other holster?"

"Don't know. Whoa, here comes the Angel!" Kensuuke exclaimed.

"What! Lemme see, lemme see, lemm- Ewwww, dat damn thing looks like da monster on dad's favorite porno..."

"You're shitting me?" Kensuuke asked, looking from the screen to Touji, who was shaking his head.

"Nope. Big, pre-postor-us-ly per-portioned purple penis thing, floatin' 'round Tokyo-Three, havin' ten'acle sex widda bunch a young girls."

"Yeah? How'd they fight it?"

"Dey had da big purple an' green Eva hosin' it down wit milk."

"Milk? Why milk?"

"Dunno. Maybe it don' like cows? I think Shinji's gots da better idea, what wit dat katana an' all."

Kensuuke went back to watching the screen as the big purple phallus assumed a battle stance of its own, standing erect, lowering its head and extending...

"See! I told ya, Ten'acles!" Touji said, pointing at the Angel. "Man, dat's just plain wrong." Then, cupping his hands to his mouth, he shouted, "Kick its ass, Ikari!" as loud as he could.

"He can't hear you."

"Eh, it's da thought dat counts, Ken. It's da thought dat counts."

"Looks like it's trying to whip Shinji into submission.

>That's..."<p>

"Don' say it, Ken."

"That's..."

"I'm warnin' yas!"

"...Kinky. Oww!" The last was said as Touji stomped on his foot. "Sorry, I had to say it!"

Touji just grumbled darkly. "Still an' all, Shinji sure can make dat Eva move. Why hasn't 'e drawn 'is sword yet?"

"Maybe he's waiting for the opportune moment?"

"Uhh... What's 'Oop-er-tune' mean?"

"That he's waiting for the perfect time to attack."

"Oh. I knew dat. I jus' forgots it fer a minute. But, why's he dancin' wit it?"

"Well, I'd say since the Angel is using its, umn, tentacles as whips, he's got to get into range where he can attack without being hit."

"Why's 'e worried 'bout gettin' hit? 'E's in a giant robot!"

"You see how those tentacles are glowing?" Kensuuke asked.

"Yeah?"

"Watch what happens when they hit the ground around the Eva's feet."

"Whoa!" Touji exclaimed, "Explosions! Dis is like a bad porno AND an eighties Sentai show! Quick, where're all da nekkid chicks and Heroes in costume?"

"Touji, this is real life. Naked chicks don't just happen randomly. You have to put some effort into it."

"Oh yeah? Says who? I'll murderize 'em."

"You'll 'murderize' who?" came a third, feminine voice from behind them.

"Whoever says Nekkid chicks don' just happen, uh, randomly.  
>Yeah." Touji said, nodding to himself as he continued to watch Kensuuke's camcorder screen.<p>

"And why would 'Nekkid chicks' randomly happen?" asked the female voice again.

"Because Touji's convinced we're in this weird cross-over between a bad porno and an eighties Sentai show." Kensuuke explained without paying attention. "Wow! Did you see that? Shinji just cut a tentacle off!"

"Tentacle?" asked the woman.

"Yeah, Ten'acle, see, the Angel's got these ten'acle things dat it's usin' as whips, and-" Touji turned around to face the person he was speaking too, and stopped. He tugged on Kensuuke's sleeve.  
"Ken."

"I'm a bit busy filming this, Touji -what is it?"

"I think you better turn around."

Noticing Touji's correct grammar, Kensuuke knew something was up. He turned, camera still plastered to his eye, and came face-

>to-viewscreen with a breast. "Whoa!"<p>

The woman rolled her eyes and shook her head as Kensuuke frantically zoomed out to get a good shot of her. "Boys, I swear..."

"Ken! Random nekkid chick!" Touji said, oogling the girl who was, by all definitions, a classic beauty in that 'Shinto Shrine Maiden' kind of way. "I'm in heaven!"

Kensuuke battled with himself between filming the girl, and the battle. Girl, or the battle. Finally, he decided on the battle.

>"Damn it! Stupid! I have to get another camera!"<p>

"Da hell're you doin' nekkid?" Touji demanded from the girl.

"Sun bathing. What the hell are you doing on my front lawn"  
>She asked him in turn as Kensuuke was heard crying softly.<p>

"Uh, filmin' da bad porn-oh, I mean, filmin' da Angel attack. Yeah."  
He considered a moment, "I'm guessin' da shrine up dere is yours, den?"

"Yes. That is the Hino Shrine. Well, the new one, anyway.  
>Old one sunk when the ocean rose over Tokyo-One."<p>

"And youse is?"

"Hino, Rei." She said.

"...wasn't dat da name of a character in dat eighties"  
>Touji's question trailed off as the woman nodded glumly.<p>

"Yes," Rei said, grimacing, "My father had a bad sense of humor."

"And youse looks jus' like 'er, too!"

"Don't know whether it's a blessing or a curse, that."

"But... don't youse care dat youse nekkid in frontta us?"

She shrugged. "If that robot loses, I'll be a lot worse off than simply embarrassed."

"Shinji's not gonna lose! He's cooler den dat!" Touji stated.

"You sound pretty confident." She said, just as Kensuuke started gesticulating madly.

"Woah! Shinji just cut the Angel in half!" He exclaimed,

>pointing.<p>

Hino and Suzuhara both looked into the view screen, watching in mute witness as the Angel fell in two distinct pieces.

"Woo-hoo! Dat's mah main man! Go Shinji! Quick, Ken! Hit the rewind!"

\-/ ' Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty " Stanza Seven: Ikari's  
Good Mood END

## 8. Honor's Duty Chapter Eight

Ludicrous Configuration! Productions Proudly Presents A Neon Genesis  
Evangelion Alternate Universe Christmas 2003 Special Double Length  
Edition By JJ Corley Associate Author: David McMillan <http://mslcp>.  
ignorance is bliss, why aren't more people happy?"

'\-/ ' Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty " Stanza Eight: Jagged  
Revelations

Unbeknownst to Nerv, Shinji's epic battle with Shamshiel had another  
observer besides Kensuuke, Touji, and Hino, one who had the awkward  
position of fully rooting for Shinji even though it had been he  
himself attempting the boy's demise not three weeks prior.

The wind blew his short-cropped blonde hair about, and he raised one  
hand, wearing a white fingerless glove, to comb through it idly. He  
was dressed in a red sweatshirt with white stripes on the shoulders  
and on the stomach, a pair of khaki dress slacks, and khaki  
suspenders. All in all, he looked exactly like Yashiro from Team  
Elemental in the old SNK King of Fighters game series.

Which suited Sachiel just fine. He rather liked KoF DM 1999,  
>even if the translators HAD screwed up on the title. It was till a  
great game. And don't get him started on KoF 2002; he could play with  
his toes and still whoop your ass (There's plenty of Dreamcasts and  
free time in Heaven).<p>

He winced in sympathy, placing one hand over his stomach in  
remembered pain as Shamshiel was defeated by a cross slash just under  
the core.

Sachiel, now calling himself Futaba Yashiro, tossed the Evangelion a  
sketchy salute as Unit-00 left the fallen foe behind.  
>Then he began down the cliff, heading towards the remains before the  
Nerv clean up crew got there.<p>

Sure, the surprise 'free continue' was nice, but Yashiro had learned  
the hard way: It's a stone cold bitch to get out of your core when  
it's packaged in a metal box.

In the middle of the Pacific.

Heading towards America.

With no cash.

No ID.

And no American Express Traveler's Cheques.

"Yeah, that was a pain in the ass."

'\-/ '

> Shinji emerged from the entry plug and glanced at the welcoming

party, giving them a sharp once over. Both Gendou and Ritsuko looked as if they were slightly worried over something.<br>Misato looked pensive yet still angry over his earlier peeping,>Kizuko, still wearing her school uniform but missing the sling,<br>cast, and bandages he had been used to seeing on her, stared back at him with her normal piercing gaze. Rei, dressed in black pleated skirt and a beige sweater with an extra wide neck, just looked sleepy.

"What? We killed it, didn't we?" he asked as Maya lightly hopped out of the entry plug to land on the walkway beside him.

"We were slightly worried," Ritsuko explained as the pair came to join them. "You achieved a Synchrograph of one hundred and twenty percent, something neither Commander Ikari nor myself thought possible with two people in the Entry Plug. How do you feel?"

Shinji shrugged, and clasped his hands behind his head. "I feel fine."

"Good. Maya?"

Maya took two steps forward, dipped Ritsuko, and planted a kiss on the startled woman's lips. Ritsuko struggled for a few seconds, then blushed furiously and went about returning it. Shinji and Gendou smirked, saw each other smirking, and then both dropped the expression, pointedly looking in different directions. Misato sputtered a moment, then put a hand to her forehead and walked off,

>muttering something about the command deck. Kizuko cocked her head slightly to the side and observed. Rei blinked, stifled a yawn, then went over to Shinji and did much the same thing to him that Maya was currently doing to Ritsuko. Shinji reacted initially as Ritsuko had,<br>but surrendered much quicker than she.

Gendou sighed, went over to his personal lift, disappearing as he spoke into his communicator. "Garibaldi, get a fire hose. I'm going to watch my new porno collection."

Kizuko watched the pair of couples kissing for a full minute before cocking her head to the other side. "Intriguing."

Rei finally broke off her kiss, and trailed the fingers of her right hand down Shinji's neck, over his LCL soaked clothes.>"What say you and I go and get you cleaned up?"<p>

Shinji blinked, and nodded quickly, blushing madly. "Un!" he said as Rei pulled him towards the baths. Kizuko, having nothing else better to do, followed.

A few minutes later, Maya finally brought her kiss with Ritsuko to a lingering close, and whispered, "Hail to the King,>baby."<p>

"Oh, Maya..." Ritsuko demurred, "Japan to Maya. Maya? Are you alright?"

"Eh?" Maya snapped out of her daydream to find everyone still standing where they were just before she had kissed Ritsuko in her dream. "I'm fine," she said to her sempai, "Just fine. Though I'm



hungry, and I need a bath. Ritsuko, you're having dinner with me tonight at eight," she stated as she walked off towards the baths.

"Eh? I'm, I'm what? Wait! Maya, wait a minute!" Ritsuko ran to catch up with the younger woman. "What's this all of a sudden?"  
>Why are you treating me to din..." her voice trailed off as the door closed behind them.<p>

"Huh. Wonder what that's all about?" Misato asked rhetorically, only to catch both Shinji and Gendou smirking at her.  
>"You both know something, don't you?"<p>

"I'd tell ya Misato, but..." Shinji started.

"...That information is classified Ultra-Violet, Captain"  
>Gendou finished.<p>

Shinji and Gendou smirked at each other and shared a laugh, after which the elder Ikari shook his head and headed out the door. He paused at the doorway. "Good work, Shinji. Expect a promotion shortly."

"Thank you... Father. Do I get a pay raise with that?"

"Naturally," Gendou smirked again, and then left.

Shinji turned to give Kizuko a once over, now that both she and Rei were standing side by side, and ran a comparison. Kizuko was shorter than Rei by about 5 centimeters, her hair was cut just slightly shorter than Rei's, and she looked a little younger than her sister. "So, feeling better?" he asked her pleasantly.

"I feel fine," she returned.

"No, I meant about the bandages and such."

"Dr. Akagi removed them while we awaited your return from the battle. They were no longer necessary," Kizuko explained.

"I'm glad you're, umn, back in top form, I guess." Shinji said, wondering how best to compliment the girl.

Kizuko just blinked at him. "It will serve."

"What's with the Vespa?" Rei asked, cutting into the conversation while eyeing the small black and grey motor scooter the Evangelion had set on the walkway before Shinji had gotten out, "You didn't steal it, did you, Shinji?"

"Nah. I bought it while I was out with Maya. Now I've got wheels. Which reminds me..." he said, running back to the entry plug. He came back carrying two helmets and a pair of driving goggles, "I keep forgetting this stuff."

He shook some LCL out of the helmets before setting one on Kizuko's head. She blinked back at him quizzically. "What is this for?"

"Want a ride home?" He asked in return. Kizuko's eyes widened a bit in understanding, and then she nodded.

Rei frowned slightly and raised an eyebrow at Shinji.  
>"Putting the moves on my sister, huh?"<p>

"Of course. I put the moves on everybody," he said, smiling at her.  
"But, you were my first kiss."

She blushed, and crossed her good arm across her stomach,  
>clasping the elbow of her left. "Oh..."<p>

Misato rolled her eyes, and turned to leave. "You're half again as smooth as you need to be, boy. One of these days you're going to end up in trouble."

"I'm sorry, Misato," he called to her retreating back.

The older woman stiffened slightly at his words before sighing. "I forgive you. God knows why, but I do. Rei's being discharged today, Ritsuko will be bringing her home around six. Be sure to be there -okay?"

"Sure, but why?" he asked.

"You're gonna be her caretaker," she explained with a sly grin and a wagging of her fingertips before darting out.

Shinji looked at Rei. Rei returned his arched gaze with a blank look of her own. "Well," she said, "This is the first I've heard about this. You?"

"Hadn't a clue," said he with a slight shrug.

"I was thinking they'd get Kizuko to..." Rei stopped in mid-

>sentence, giving her younger 'sister' an appraising look. "No, no,<br>never mind. I can see what a disaster that would have been."

"I am a disaster?" Kizuko asked, cocking her head to the side ever so slightly.

"Not at all. You just lack the knowledge required for the job." Rei explained hastily, her right hand moving up and down in an 'I didn't mean that as an insult' gesture.

Kizuko looked at her own hand and then mimicked the motion,

>causing Shinji to snicker and Rei to sigh. "What job?" she asked after a moment.<p>

"Cooking, cleaning, entertainment, physical therapy," Rei didn't like the gleam that came into Shinji's eyes when she said that, "Umn, helping me dress," she really didn't like the gleam now,  
>"And, uh..."<p>

"Bathing," Kizuko offered.

"Yes, Bat- what? No! No, you're not helping me take baths,

>Shinji!" Rei exclaimed, pointing at him accusingly, "So get the

thought out of your head right now!"<p>

He sighed. "And for a second there I had my hopes up,  
>honest. But I still get to see you naked."<p>

Rei narrowed her eyes. "How so?"

"Bras are a bitch/exceedingly difficult one handed," he and Kizuko explained at the same time.

"I'll get Mom to help. Or Misato. Not. You," Rei stated flatly.

Shinji sighed in defeat. "Mou... you take all the fun out of my life."

A small window suddenly popped up in front of Shinji,  
>causing him to step back. "Shinji, report to the briefing room,<br>now!" Ritsuko demanded from the comm. window.

"Uh, sure, just one question," he asked.

"What?"

"Where is it?"

"You... Urrggh," She sighed, then pointed at Kizuko.  
>"Ayanami, show him the way." The window flipped around, so that the picture was facing Rei. "And back to the hospital with you."<p>

"Do I have to?"

"Yes!" Ritsuko snapped as the window disappeared.

"Damn. Well, have fun getting yelled at, Shinji." Rei offered with a wave.

'\-/'

> Shinji shifted uncomfortably on the metal folding chair inside the debriefing room, which was a rather sparsely furnished,<br>soundproofed room near to the pilots changing rooms. Ritsuko towered above him, anger narrowing her eyes and pulling her usual bemused smile into a tight, disapproving frown. "What the hell were you thinking," she finally demanded, hands on her hips, one foot tapping impatiently as she continued. "Asking the Magi for communications silence?"

"Umn, I had something to say that I didn't want overheard"  
>Shinji said as he shifted under her eyes.<p>

"Oh? Really? What was so important that you cut off all systems from head quarters? Yes, ALL. Don't give me that 'I didn't know that' crap. The Magi are quite literal about that sort of thing."

"Oh. Just, you know, giving Maya a pep-talk."

"I don't think telling Maya that the Angel was the only obstacle between her, myself, and mad passionate sex to be a proper 'pep-talk'," Ritsuko ground out, giving him a stare which could burn holes in linoleum.

"I don't remember wording it quite like that but..." A thought occurred to him, "How'd you find out, anyway? Evangelion flight recorder?" he asked.

"Something like that, yes."

Shinji sighed, and shook his head. "Really, Ritsuko, I don't see the problem here. I needed to get her motivated, and that did it. It's not my fault the girl has a crush on you the size of Unit Zero. She just does. If you don't like it, you need to tell her that - not me."

Ritsuko just glared at him.

Shinji squinted at her. "Unless... you're not sure if you should crush Maya's hopes and dreams when you yourself are still confused on your own sexual orienta-

Ritsuko slapped him. Hard. She spun around again, clutching her wrist and swearing, "God fucking damn it, Ikari! I'm not getting into this with a fucking virgin!"

Shinji rubbed his cheek, muttering to himself. That had actually hurt some. "Fine. Talk to Misato or Gendou or something. I apologize for making it seem as if I promised you to Maya after the fight, and I hope it doesn't ruin our friendship. The fact remains, >however, that had I not said what I said, I would have had no hope of defeating the Angel. I was only attempting to follow your advice.<br>Since the damage has already been done, I can only humbly ask for your forgiveness," he finished, rising from his chair and bowing deeply.

Ritsuko's expression softened a bit, bringing the room's temperature five degrees closer to normal. "The logical part of me realizes the valid need for your actions, but the emotional side of me is not very pleased with you, Shinji. However, I do accept your apology. Now, get out of here before I change my mind and kill you after all."

"Yes ma'am!"

'\-/'

> Shinji found Kizuko outside the debriefing room, next to his Vespa, right where he had left her. "Sorry for taking so long. Ready to go?"<p>

The quiet blue haired girl nodded. "Yes."

A few minutes later they had exited the Geofront via elevator. Shinji then drove the Vespa through the streets of Tokyo->3, following Kizuko's soft spoken directions until he stopped at a nice apartment complex about ten kilometers from his own. "Not a bad place," he said as he removed his helmet, dropping it on the seat of the Vespa and leaving his goggles dangling around his neck.<p>

"The commander chose it," was all Kizuko said as she placed her own helmet by Shinji's and started to walk towards the building.

>Shinji followed. She gave him a glance as she started up the flight of stairs, but did not say anything. They stopped at the fourth floor

and Kizuko entered apartment 408. Shinji, lacking anything better to do for the moment, entered behind her, wondering idly what kind of room Kizuko kept for herself.<p>

The answer was rather plain. The room was very Spartan in furnishings, having only a bed, a small desk against the wall near the entrance, a dresser, a personal refrigerator, which had a pair of beakers and some medicine on top, and there was a violin in a corner. A large window filled most of the wall behind the bed with curtains a faded drab green color, yet pulled shut against the failing daylight.

Shinji was rather unimpressed. The life of a true martial artist was spent training; yet even he had more random junk than Kizuko apparently had. "Umn, nice place?" he cautiously ventured.

She turned to regard him, and seemed puzzled at his presence. "What can I do for you?" she asked in her usual monotone.

Blank Cheque! he mentally exclaimed before posing dramatically, extending one arm towards her, palm up. "Your panties," he said seriously, making a 'bring it' motion with his hand, "Give them to me."

His eyes widened, face losing all emotion save disbelief as she proceeded to do so. She placed the unadorned white cotton underwear on his palm and stepped back, looking at him expectantly. >He shuddered as his body automatically absorbed her Ki, which, were it alcohol, would have been labeled '200 Proof'. It left him with a guilty feeling, as if he had just snuck into Eden and yanked the Forbidden Fruit. "You're like, the ultimate definition of innocence,<br>aren't you?" he asked rhetorically.

She said nothing, simply watching him with her crimson eyes.

He sighed, feeling rather put out. "You take all the fun out of this. Put 'em back on."

She took them from him, and did so, her expression never wavering. "If you did not want them," she asked, straightening, "Why did you request them?"

"I was just trying to be silly," he replied, walking over and sitting backwards in the swivel chair that belonged to the desk. >She sat on the bed and he turned the chair to face her. "And usually it leads to some training, something I haven't been getting a lot of recently. I gotta do something about that, before I get all lazy."<p>

"Training?" Kizuko asked, cocking her head, "How does asking for one's panties lead to training?"

Her question almost mirrored his own, years ago, which he had asked his other, other, other Sensei, so he decided to give her something close to Happosai's answer. "Most women are sensitive to blunt questions involving their undergarments, and such a request will usually lead to them accusing one of being a pervert and proceeding to chase one with intent to do severe bodily harm for insult to their person. There are few things faster on this earth than an enraged female," he said while thinking, Damn, I've been hanging around

Ritsuko a bit too much...

"So the objective of such a request is to promote personal insult?" she asked.

"No, the desired effect is usually to get them angry enough to chase you, so you can dodge their attacks and test your stamina while running at high speeds for fairly long distances," he said,

>scratching his noggin, "but in this case, I just wanted to be silly and see how you reacted. I didn't think you'd actually give me your panties."<p>

"I do not understand your incomprehension. It was a valid request," she stated.

"A valid request, huh? What would constitute an invalid request?" he asked, curious.

"Anything involving injury to my person."

Shinji cocked an eyebrow at her. "Really? So I could ask you to have mad, passionate sex with me, and you would? Just like that?"

This actually got a reaction. She blushed so slightly that if she wasn't so perfectly fair of skin he would not have noticed, >and her eyes dipped from his for an instant. "You wish to become one with me?" she asked.<p>

"I've thought about it, I admit, though we've only known each other for about a month now. You are rather attractive, you know." Her eyes remained locked on his, deep crimson against his earthen brown as he returned her question, "Do you wish to become one with me?"

"It would be..." she hesitated for a moment before finishing, "Pleasant."

They were both silent for a long while, Shinji in deep thought, while Kizuko merely waited for him to respond, their eyes remaining locked. Finally, he blinked, and sighed. "I'm still attempting to straighten out a few things in my life right now. Can I get back to you on this?"

"Yes."

"Thanks," he said as he rose, and headed for the door, >"Anyway, I better get going. Ritsu's mad enough at me already without me being late for Rei's homecoming, so I should probably show up early and cook something by way of apology. Again."<p>

She nodded. "Goodbye, Ikari."

"See ya later, Kizuko!" he said with a cheery wave as he disappeared from her sight.

The Vespa roared to life, and pulled away from the apartment complex.

Above, with the curtains open for the first time she could remember, Ayanami Kizuko stood, fingers pressed to the glass,

>watching him depart. "Ikari... He Who Is The One..."<p>

'\-/'

> Shinji entered his apartment grumbling, which caught the attention of Misato. "What're you all mad about?" she asked, pausing in her efforts to hanging up a banner which read 'Welcome Home Rei!<br>(A 'Don't get your ass whooped next time' party)'.  
</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Some crazy woman wielding a Rickenbacker on a yellow Vespa dusted me on the way home," he muttered, eyeing her. She was wearing the thin yellow and black polka-dot tank top and the super tight short-shorts he liked so well. "Some people are just crazy. She must've been going two hundred kilometers an hour at the very least." He paused, now eyeing the sign. "Are you sure that's appropriate?"</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Probably not, but she'll think it's funny," Misato said cheerfully. "Hey, gimme a boost so I can pin this up, hey? I had to try balancing on the table to put up the last one, and, well, I fell off three times," she said, revealing herself not to be fully sober.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Why don't you use a ladder?"</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Don't have one," she replied.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"I should have been expecting that, honest. So, how many Nerv personnel does it take to change a light bulb?" he asked.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Two. Now get over here and be my foot stool!"</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Yes, mon Capitan," he said, kneeling and offering his laced hands as a purchase.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>Misato looked a bit dubious, but then shrugged. "If you drop me, I'll hurt you."</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Just hurry up, I have food to cook."</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Ouuoo, return of Shinji the Master Chef, eh? How'd we luck out on that?" Misato asked as she as she placed one foot in Shinji's hands.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Apology for me pissing Ritsuko off," he explained as he straightened slowly, raising Misato easily.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Lucky us. You should piss her off more often." She said as she used a thumbtack to pin the sign to the ceiling. "There! Down please."</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Sur-"</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"WAAAAH!" came a shout from behind him.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Ahhhh!" Misato screamed.</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>Shinji had a split second to decide, No Fall or Grope?</p>
</div>
<div>
<p>"Woaeeeeouuagh!" he said, grabbing all the way down.</p>
</div>

Thump-Thump

Ritsuko surveyed her handiwork from where she stood by the front door. Not bad for one bellow, she thought as she smirked at the two sprawled on the floor in what appeared to be a sensual embrace, what with Shinji simultaneously fondling a breast and groping Misato's ass. "Oh, am I interrupting something, Misato?"

Said purple haired woman was on her feet in an instant, >glaring first at the boy, and then at the blonde scientist. "No fucking fair, Ritsuko! That hurt, you know!"<p>

"Misato, you're standing on my spleen." Shinji groaned from under her.

Misato quickly stepped off of him, and helped Shinji to his feet. "Oh, I'm sorry, Shinji! You're not hurt too badly, are you? >You can still cook, right?" she asked, the amount of concern in her voice causing the young man to grimace.<p>

"Shinji can cook?" asked Rei from behind her mother, who was still blocking the entrance into the apartment, "I didn't know that."

"He's good at it, too! Better than Ritsuko even," Misato said as she pushed Shinji into the kitchen.

"Okay, Okay, I get the hint! I'll cook, I'll cook! Sheesh. >Go back to what you were doing," he muttered.<p>

And so ran the general theme of the evening. After the meal, >to which even Rei admitted to Shinji's mastery off the Culinary Arts (Which he claimed was his foster father's wife's fault, Saotome Kasumi-san, who had mastered the Anything Goes School of Martial Arts Combat Cooking long ago and had made Shinji her heir), the older women broke out the beer while Shinji and Rei relaxed with some ice cream.<p>

"So, what am I supposed to be doing as Rei's caretaker" >Shinji asked Ritsuko.<p>

She handed him a thick manila folder as an answer. "Read up."

"Holy Schnikies and Egads, like," he exclaimed, briefly flipping through the pages, giving a cursory inspection to the exercise diagrams, physical therapy instructions, and dietary guidelines, "You want me to make her do all of this stuff?"

"Exactly." Ritsuko withdrew a small daily planner from her purse and handed it to Shinji as well. "I've scheduled everything she needs to do for the next four months. All you have to do is stick to the schedule and do what the instructions tell you."

"For some reason I get the feeling you should be telling me all this, mom." Rei groused, finishing the last of her ice cream. >"And not him."<p>

Ritsuko gently tousled her daughter's hair and smirked. "If I trusted you to do this stuff on your own, you'd never do it, you lazy little brat."



Instead of a rebuke, Rei just sighed resignedly, and stared longingly at Shinji's unfinished ice cream. "Mou..."

'\-/'

> Yashiro was getting a little tired. Which was fair, as he had been hauling his unconscious cargo over one shoulder through mountainous terrain for the past five hours. He wanted to get as far from the site of the battle as possible to give Shamshiel enough time to recover. The question was where could they go? He had already walked halfway around the valley that sheltered Tokyo-03, <br>but he was reluctant to enter the human city with Shamshiel unconscious and, well, dressed in what Shamshiel was dressed in.

His cargo groaned, stirring softly. Yashiro knelt and did his best to set his passenger down gently. "It's about damn time you woke up. I'm not your cabbie," he complained good-naturedly.

"Mnn?" Shamshiel winced before coming to fully. "Wha?  
>What happen?"<p>

Yashiro couldn't resist. "Someone set up us the bomb," he explained with a maniacal grin.

Shamshiel blinked, then scowled at the blonde man. "There's only one person I can think of who'd use that stupid old geek joke.

>Sachiell! The hell happened to you?"<p>

"I know it's old, but I think it's funny. As for what happened, we got a free continue."

"Free continue?"

"Second chance, another try, 'Round 2 Fight' or something like that. And before you ask me why I look like this, I... think you should take a look at yourself, 'Angel'," he said with a grin,  
>one eyebrow waggling suggestively.<p>

"What?" Shamshiel asked as Yashiro stood by and watched as his companion looked, jumped up, checked, patted the ass, felt the breasts, and finally exclaimed: "I'm a girl?"

"Yep."

"A girl, wearing pseudo-chaps, bikini briefs, and a Juicy jacket two sizes too small with nothing under it," she stated.

"Yep. Thanks for the free show, by the way."

"Christ on a crutch, Sachiell, if you don't shut it I'll"  
>She clapped both hands over her mouth and looked around for a place to hide before eyeing the sky nervously.<p>

Yashiro shook his head. Shamshiel'll never learn... he thought while saying, "First of all, I go by Yashiro now. Secondly,  
>relax. I think we're more or less human right now. Well, as human as video game characters can be, anyway. Or maybe we're Shito?" He asked himself as he watched Shamshiel drop her hands from her mouth and draw a deep breath. He held up a hand to forestall the coming torrent

of insults, advising sagely: "Still, I wouldn't push it, if I were you." ESPECIALLY if I were you... he left unsaid.<p>

"You take all the fun out of this, you know that?" she asked, only to have him smirk and shrug by way of reply. "So, >obviously, Yashiro from King of Fighters. But that would make me who?"<p>

"Angel, from KOF Two Thousand Two," he supplied, "Your hair is even platinum. It's kinda cool, really."

"It's getting cold, is what it is. Angel, huh? Good a name as any, I guess."

"You're actually taking 'Angel' as a name?" Yashiro asked, >incredulous.<p>

"Yes, I am, Yashiro," she snapped, "Problem?"

Yashiro snapped to attention, yelping "No ma'am!"

"Good. At ease, Lord of Monday. You're my superior, >remember?" She paused, then shook her head, "Christ, who's plan was this, anyway? This is so fucking bizarre. I wasn't informed anything like this would happen..." Angel trailed off, unable to answer the questions she had and not wanting to create any more than necessary.<p>

"Complaining already?" Yashiro asked, raising an eyebrow, >"You haven't even gone through a tenth of what I did, and you're bitching?"<p>

"You weren't the 60 meter phallus attacking Tokyo, >'Yashiro'. I have a right to bitch, bitch. Deal," she groused,<br>looking around. "Where are we?"

"Halfway around the valley. I didn't think hauling your scantily clad ass through Tokyo-Three was a good idea. Kinda counter productive if you ask me. 'Oh, yes, Sorry Mr. Policeman, didn't mean to carry dead hooker through public streets, next time I will use back alleys and sewer access to properly dispose of body'," he feigned the conversation with an air of annoyance.

"Okay, okay. I get the picture. So we're just gonna camp out, here, in the dark?"

"That was the plan, genius. Unless you've got a better one? >Please tell me you do."<p>

"We could always strip down and share body heat," Angel offered, pulling the zipper of her jacket down halfway.

A beam of light suddenly illuminated the area, light blinding the two former Angels as they turned towards it. The beam dropped down a bit as an annoyed feminine voice asked, "The hell are you two doing getting naked in my front yard?"

Angel immediately pulled her zipper back up.

Yashiro sighed, disappointed, then shrugged. "My girlfriend and I were out on a picnic when the Angel attacked. We got scared and ran blindly through the woods, and now, well, we're lost," he said, ignoring the look Angel was giving him.

"You're lost?" the woman with the flashlight asked skeptically.

Yashiro was about to further explain when Angel cut in,  
>"Hey, you have a preposterously proportioned purple penis drop unexpectedly into your lap and let's see how well you take it"<br>she said, crossing her arms and looking defiant.

Yashiro and the woman just stared at her for a long moment,  
>before the other woman spoke. "That's the second time today I've heard someone call it that."<p>

"Really?" Yashiro asked, before continuing, "The laws of causality must be especially active if you've heard that invective twice. I feel for you."

"Not really, the delivery was much better the second time around, with the innuendo added it's definitely a '10'."

Angel just growled at them both.

The woman sighed. "Well, let's get you out of the cold at least. The Hino Shrine invites you to stay for a night's rest."

"Ah, we weary travelers humbly accept the Hino Shrine's gracious invitation. Don't we, Angel?"

"Yeah, yeah."

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> Ritsuko was dressed up for the first time since her college days. Being the Director of Project E didn't leave her with enough free time to pursue a relationship that wasn't at least partially work-related, and to be brutally honest, she really didn't like men who were overly intellectual. They tended to get too defensive for her tastes when confronted with conflicting data opposed to their theories and/or opinions. It wasn't really flattering in her opinion.

In truth, the only male 'egghead' she knew who didn't act that way was Ikari Gendou, and, well...

Admit it, he's an asshole. An acceptable asshole, but still an asshole, she said to herself, frowning.

Shinji, entering the room, walked face-first into her frown and flinched. "Don't do that," he yelped. "It makes me feel as if I did something wrong all of a sudden. Brrr."

"Shut it, Ikari. It's your damn fault I'm stuck on this date anyway," Ritsuko replied icily.

Shinji made a show of checking the thermostat before turning to Rei, who was lazing next to Misato on the couch, watching a television show on sharks. "Is it just me," he asked, "or did the overall

temperature of the room just drop like, two degrees?"

"Well, they used to call her the 'Ice Queen' in college. For good reason," Misato said, causing Ritsuko to shift her gaze to her.

>She held her beer can in the path of Ritsuko's frigid glare for a moment before taking another sip. "Ah, much better. You're almost as good as the fridge, Ritsu!"<p>

"Can it, Katsuragi!"

"Nerve hit, twenty points," intoned Rei.

Ritsuko ground her teeth in frustration.

Shinji came towards her, hands held up before him in an appeasing gesture, "Okay, Dr. Akagi, calm down. They're just teasing you, they don't mean anything by it."

"And what about you?" she snapped.

"I was just trying to lighten the mood, I apologize."

She furrowed her brow in irritation. "I don't want to do this. I shouldn't have to be doing this. Why am I doing this? Oh yes, I remember, you set me up," she muttered.

Shinji sighed, and pointed at Misato and Rei. "Not a word from either of you," he said before turning his full attention to Ritsuko. "You are about to go out for a nice dinner and perhaps a decent film with a colleague who you enjoy working with. That's it."

>That's all. If anything else happens it would be because you both mutually decided for it to happen. This is meek, mousy lil' Maya we're talking about, here. She's not going to twist your arm into anything. In fact, I bet you two thousand en she's hyperventilating right now just thinking about the prospect of even seeing you outside of work. Peanut gallery, am I right?" he asked Misato and Rei.<p>

"Damn straight."

"Got it in one, Shinji."

He gave Ritsuko one of those 'What did I tell you' looks, >and the woman sighed, relenting somewhat. "And just how did you become an authority on Maya?"<p>

"I spent the better part of this afternoon visiting her favorite hang outs, listening to her talk about her hopes and dreams, and gush about you. Then we both proceeded to fight to the death with an Angel. I've come to know the girl a bit. Just relax, >you're both going to be nervous as hell, if you expect that, you can deal with it and try to enjoy yourselves."<p>

Ritsuko nodded, and sighed. "All right, I'll go. But I swear, Shinji, if you ever put me up to this sort of thing again, I will torture you."

"What happened to the killing?" Rei asked.

"Can't kill him, he's important to the survival of mankind.  
>I can cut out his appendix without anesthesia, though."<p>

"Hey, I need this appendix, thank you," he growled.

"No you don't."

"Hey, I was born with it. Who are you to mess with the packaging?"

Ritsuko chuckled for the first time that evening before leaving.

About two minutes afterward, Ritsuko's phone rang. Shinji answered it, "Hello, Akagi-Katsuragi-Ayanami-Ikari residence, can I-  
> "ohmygodstopherfromleavingIcan'tgothroughwiththisI'mtoonervo  
usIcan'tbreatheIcan't..."<p>

"Maya, Stop. Exhale. Now, take a deep breath. Hold it. Hold it. One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand. Let it out, slowly, slowly, good. Now relax. Ritsuko's already left, she left her cell behind, you can't call it off, but everything is okay.

>Everything is fine. You will go to the dinner, and you will enjoy yourself. You will see if there are any good movies playing, and if so, you will both decide which one to watch. Okay?"<p>

A very meek, small sounding "okay," was heard from the girl.

"Good. She'll be there in twenty minutes. Breathe. Relax.  
>Brush your hair. I'm hanging up now, you'll be fine," he said, and did, thinking perhaps he had heard a small 'thanks' before he did so. Shinji shook his head; he had hoped to avoid using the Saotome Anything Goes School Of Martial Arts Secret Technique of Telling Them What They Want To Hear. "Damn teenagers."<p>

Misato thought that remark hilarious.

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> Ritsuko came home at two thirty in the morning, looking just a bit rumpled, and no longer angry, which was an improvement in Shinji's book. Ritsuko was surprised, however, to find Misato and Shinji still up, apparently waiting for her. The two looked up from their game of chess, which Shinji was slowly losing, to greet her.<p>

"Morning!" he said.

"Welcome back, Ritsuko."

"What are you two doing up? Waiting on me? I'm an adult, you realize. Perfectly able to take care of myself." She crossed her arms, which drew the attention of the two to something different about Ritsuko's clothing.

Shinji glanced to Misato, who waved him down. He shrugged.  
>"I just wanted to make sure everything went alright, and to see if you were still mad at me or not."<p>

"Everything went fine. It was just a date. And no, I'm no longer angry with you," she said, coming over and ruffling his hair

affectionately. "Maya pointed out a few things that made me realize how foolish I was being. So, I owe you an apology."

"No you don't. I made the mistake; you were perfectly justified in your reaction. But if things turned out well in the end, good. I'll just be heading off to bed now," he said, giving Misato a hard look. "Be nice."

"Aren't I always?" the woman asked, feigning innocence.

"No. Goodnight, ladies."

Ritsuko looked confused, "What's he on about?"

"He thought you should have stayed for the morning coffee"  
>Misato said simply.<p>

Ritsuko stared at her. "I should have what?"

Misato tried a different tactic: Bluntness. She pointed at Ritsuko's top. "That's not the blouse you left in. Similar, but not quite. That, and you look happier than I've seen you in years."

"It's not what you think."

"Oh? Then whose shirt is it? A little fancy for a guy's."

Ritsuko stroked her forehead and sighed before sitting across from Misato at the table, eyeing the chess pieces. "I spilt wine on my blouse. Maya let me barrow one of hers. That's all."

"Uh huh. Sure. And you did what for three hours?"

"We talked, Misato. Which is a lot more than you and Kaji ever did when given a comparable amount of free time."

Misato had the good graces to look a little sheepish. "Okay, >okay, I'm a hedonist, I admit it. You like to think, I like to feel.<br>That's just how I am," she said, and then asked, "You two really just talked? For three hours?"

"Yes. Please tell me you're not going to be weird about this."

Misato began placing the chessmen in their starting positions, saying only, "Weird about what?"

"Me and Maya."

Finished resetting the board, Misato asked, "Why? Are you two going to start dating?"

Ritsuko moved a pawn. "I don't know. She's a friend and a co-worker, and the idea of having a... significant relationship with another woman is... well, it frightens me somewhat."

"That's just your society talking. Ignore it and focus on what you want," Misato said, moving a knight.

"Easy for you to say..." Ritsuko muttered, answering this by placing

her black bishop mid-board.

Misato frowned, placing a pawn between her knight and Ritsuko's bishop. "Yeah, it is easy to say. I have to admit, it would be hard for me to do as well."

"Oh?" Ritsuko asked, moving another pawn forward, "Miss pleasure seeker meets her match?"

"No, more like I've never been seriously attracted to another woman before," she said, advancing with her other knight.

"Ah."

They finished the game of chess in silence. It was a draw.

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> Sunday morning found Yashiro and Angel in the city proper of Tokyo-Three. Angel was in a rather foul mood. "I can't believe that lady made us do all that work!" she grumped.<p>

"Well, she did put us up for a night, fed us and everything.

>It was the least we could do in return, really."<p>

"I'm an Angel, damn it! I don't need to put up with that kind of shit. I should set her damn temple on fire or something."

"You wouldn't dare. She was nice to us and you know it"

>Yashiro said with a frown.<p>

"Okay, I'll be the first to admit she was nice, and the food was good, but still!"

"I think you just don't like to do yard work," he concluded.

"No. No, I don't. You said you lived in an apartment, right?

>No yard?"<p>

"None that we need to maintain, at any rate."

"So, where is it, already? My feet are getting tired."

"We passed it already."

"We what?" Angel asked, deadpan.

"I need to go food shopping, and you need to get some new clothes. You're not going to get any favorable job while wearing that, though the red light district would love to accommodate you"  
>he said as they neared a clothing boutique.<p>

"But, I don't have any money!"

"I do. You will owe me until you can earn enough to pay me back. Just don't go overboard and you'll be fine."

"Oh. Well, thank you, Yashiro," Angel said softly.

"Don't mention it," he said as he opened the door to the boutique.  
"Now, get in there and pick out something nice. Think two sets of

casual and something to lounge around the house in. We'll get you some more next pay day."

"Okay."

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>Somewhere in America.<br>(Somewhere between where Bruce Springsteen was "Born in the USA" and John Mellencamp's "Little Pink Houses" to be precise)

A man, dressed in an opulent robe, sat behind a mahogany desk within his vast home in the American mid-west. He was smoking a cigarette and looking out the window, reflecting on life, when his phone rang.

"Eblis Smith," he answered.

The person on the other side was obviously traveling at a high speed, as the wind whistling by the receiver was clearly heard.

>"Yeah, Azaiel here, I've got a bit of news for you."<p>

"Oh?"

"Yes. Another Angel came down in Japan yesterday, I spotted it over the pacific at four, and when I swung around again at at about five thirty in the afternoon, it had been defeated. That Yashiro guy you told me about? I saw him pull a girl from the core."

Eblis leaned forward, scribbling a few notes on his blotter as Azaiel gave him her description, asking only, "Are you sure?"

"Hey, I may only have one eye available to me, but it works just fine. I managed to airbrake long enough to use that magnification thingie you gave me, man, that sucker works wonders for shit like this."

"Glad to hear it's working out."

"Yeah. I can't wait until that Shinji kid kicks all their asses so I can finally get down from here. I tell you, this falling shit is getting old."

Eblis chuckled slightly before ending the call. He then dialed another number. "Yes, Albert? This is Eblis. I'm going to need you to make another of those packets for me. Yes. Female, Five five, approximately a hundred and twenty pounds, platinum hair, blue eyes. How soon can you get it done? All of it by tomorrow? Can you speed that up a bit? Yes, it is rather urgent; I have a new agent in need of a cover-" His palm pilot beeped, signaling the receipt of new E-mail. "One moment, Albert. Ah, excellent -I have photographs of her now, I'm forwarding them to you. Can you just get the license, passport, and VISA to me today, using these? Yes, I noticed, they look perfect to me as well. In an hour and a half?>Thank you. I'll bring your fee by."<p>

He hung up the phone again, and sighed. "More than ever, >hour after hour, work is never over," he sang to himself.<p>

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> Shinji was sitting next to Rei on the sofa in their apartment, and allowed her to continue her therapy exercises on her own for a while as he attempted to pin down this odd feeling. It was nagging him, as if he had meant to do something at some point, yet forgotten what it was. He concentrated for a moment, but it failed to come to him. He decided to ask Rei. "Hey, have I forgotten to do anything?"<p>

"What do you mean?" she asked in return, taking a moment to let her arm rest, and turning her full attention to Shinji.

"I'm not sure. I've just got this strong suspicion that I was supposed to do something, and haven't."

"Humnn..." she thought, frowning gently, "You've tortured me twice already, you cooked breakfast, Mom and Misato are still sleeping off their chess tournament... did you remember to feed Pen->Pen?" she asked, and he nodded. "Oh. Did you leave any of your Vespa stuff in the entry plug?" He shook his head no. "Did you remember to belt the Angel one for Touji's little sister?"<p>

Shinji jumped up, and slapped his fist in his palm. "That's it!" he said, "I was going to ask Father about arranging better care for Touji's sister."

"Yeah? You'd do that for him?" Rei asked.

"Touji made it personal. I can't just ignore it."

"You're a good man, Ikari Shinji," she said, and then on impulse, she kissed him.

He didn't flinch from her this time. "What is it with you and kissing me?"

"Why? Want me to stop?"

"Not really, no."

"Then why complain?"

"I'm not complaining, per se," he said, shrugging. "I'm just curious to the reason behind it. Someone might get the wrong idea someday."

"Because I like you, you saved my life, and you have a body to die for," She said, listing the reasons. "And maybe I'd want them to get the wrong idea so I can keep you to my own little self."

"Didn't your mother ever teach you to share?"

"Oh, I can share," she said, smirking. "I just don't want to."

"Hey, this is free love, girlie. Free love. You'll have to jump on the bandwagon."

"Oh, I'll jump your bandwagon," she said seductively, >running a finger down his cheek. "And I'll play your fiddle too."<p>

"I'll have you know it's a cello, not a fiddle," he said,

>catching her hand.<p>

"Ouoo, even better. I can practice my bow work."

"It's too early in the morning for such innuendo," Misato said from the hall, looking at the two blearily. "Where's breakfast?"

"In the fridge," Shinji answered. "I think you need to get back to your exercises," he said to Rei.

"Oh, yes, particularly -hey!" She glared at Misato, who had whapped her lightly upside the head as she walked past.

"I said cut it out. It's vaguely disturbing. What would your mother say?"

"Use protection," Rei quipped.

"Oh, ha ha."

"I'm calling my Father now. Back to your therapy, you sexy thing. And as for you Misato, you're about to pour beer on your rice."

"Oh. Kirin, not Kikkoman. Thought it was soy sauce for a minute."

Shinji sighed and picked up the phone.

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> Gendou and Fuyutsuki were playing Mahjong in Gendou's massive office. "You know," Fuyutsuki said as he set a tile down with a clack, "Yesterday's battle went pretty well, all things considered."<p>

"I concur. Although the timing seems a little early to me. I thought it was to happen later than this. No real problem, but..."

"I know what you mean. It just goes to show you that our guesses, while educated, are still just guesses."

Gendou nodded sagely as his cell phone rang. He hit the "answer" button. "Ikari."

"Father."

"Ah, Shinji. What can I do for you?"

"A classmate of mine said his little sister was injured during my first battle. Last name of Suzahara. So I was wondering..."

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>That night.<p>

Rei was having The Dream again.

She stood nude before a imperfect duplicate of herself, a woman whose body mirrored her own except the porcelain-white skin had no flaw or blemish, as if it were molded like a doll, and whose hair was as white as her skin. On her face was a mask, seemingly made of metal, with seven eyes embossed on its surface, three on the left, four on

the right, and a triangle whose baseline ran center point through the first pair of eyes, with the apex terminating on the chin of the mask. After these facts could be established, the other woman would remove her mask, revealing a face that was blank, >devoid of all human features, save her two eyes -eyes crimson red,<br>like her own.

The first time she dreamt this dream, twelve-year-old Rei had awoken immediately after the woman had removed her mask, >screaming in fright. It had taken a few hours before she was able to sleep again that night.<p>

The second time she dreamt the dream, she had managed to not awaken screaming at the sight of the other woman's face. She had instead woken screaming after hearing the other woman speak, her voice a twisted parody of Rei's own.

The third time she dreamt the dream, she was ready for the strange woman. "I am Lilith. You are Ikari Yui. We are One," she had said. When Rei asked what she meant, the woman explained. She explained everything the young Rei could understand. The next morning, Rei confronted Gendou with the information she had been given by Lilith, and Ikari Gendou's house of cards nearly toppled.

As a result, Gendou had been forced to tell Rei more than he had ever told anyone before: of the Angels, the origins of the Evangelions, of her creation, and of SEELE, and that corrupt organization's goals for their 'Third Impact'.

For a tentative moment, everything had been balanced on the young woman's ability to comprehend the power she had been given; >but Rei was no longer simply a young woman. A part of her was Yui Ikari, a woman with over twenty years experience in the field of secrets; another was Lilith, a being older than them all, exiled and punished for transgressions against God and her husband, only now tasting freedom after so long. And both were a part of Ayanami Rei.<p>

And so Gendou had been left to his devices, as long as she was left to be what she appeared: a young girl. Gendou had only one problem with this. The Dummy Core System, still in its early infancy, would be fully overwhelmed and ruined if placed in contact with Rei again. And so, Ayanami Kizuko, formerly Dummy System Test Unit #3, was 'born', the ten-year-old clone placed under the direct supervision of Ikari Gendou, High Commander of Nerv.

"Thinking of the past again, Rei?" Lilith asked, bemused.

She nodded. "I always do, when we meet like this. It's very strange."

"As strange as uniting with the remnants of your soul which are trapped within Unit One?"

"No, that's stranger still," she said with a small laugh.

Lilith shook her head, not quite understanding. "And yet you continue to Ride it? I have never understood that. Can you tell me why?"

Rei studied Lilith for a long moment. "It's like, when you come here,

or when we're awake, I guess, since I can't tell you're around when I'm conscious. It's, I don't know... freedom. For a while, I feel whole again."

"I do not," Lilith shuddered, as if cold, "The flesh of Adam, it tries to cast me out when you Ride it."

"Huh..." Rei said, and then asked rhetorically, "I wonder if the same thing happens with Kizuko?"

"I do not think so. Do you remember our activation test with Unit Zero?"

Rei nodded. "'The same, but different' she said. And then I couldn't pilot it."

"Indeed. Unit Zero is part of me and part of Adam. I am surprised the poor creature can function at all. As it is I cannot contact Kizuko in dreams this way; I believe it is due to her being more like how I was before my fall, whereas you are more like how I was after."

"Oh, that's a comforting thought. 'Hi, my name is Ayanami, >and I'm a domineering sex fiend! Wanna go make out'?" She said in a mock cheerful tone, smiling at Lilith before dropping the charade and sighing.<p>

Lilith giggled a bit before giving up and laughing. "That's not quite what I meant. Your soul began to remember a part of who you were. Its too bad it was the jealous wife part," Lilith said in a tone which implied she would be sticking her tongue out at Rei.

"Don't remind me... If mom hadn't saved me, then..." Rei's right hand loosely clasped her throat, stroking the skin lightly as she remembered the pain of being strangled.

"That was, what? Ten years ago?"

"Yeah. I was six. To think... just a few insults, and she..." Rei shuddered. "Can we talk about something else? I hate remembering that."

Lilith shrugged. "Ikari Shinji. Tell me about him. What is he like?"

"Shinji? A jerk, a hero. A pervert, a gentleman. He's a self contradiction in motion who doesn't give a damn about anything and cares about everything just the same. Half the time I want to strangle his stupid heroic ass, and the other half I want to kiss him because he's so kind and gentle and romantic..."

"Ouuooo... Sounds like someone's in love." Lilith teased.

"I know. But the situation is weird. I can't help but flirt with him, he's a dream come true for any teenage girl. But I'm not just a teenage girl, I remember bits and pieces of raising him, and of being with his dad. And still I want to have this physical relationship with him so badly. I feel like a pervert."

"He was your son, but is no longer."

"Pardon?"

"Since you are a clone of both Yui and I, it is more as if he were a cousin several times removed. Your genetic data is vastly different now, more so than you realize, apparently. Even if you do not take that into account, you're not entirely 'human' anymore.

>You're Lilim now. Congratulations, the human rules no longer apply."<p>

"Lilim?" Rei asked.

"Yes. All the Children are, to some extent, though only you and Shinji are Trueborn. I do wonder how Yui and Gendou pulled that one off."

"Blood of my blood, flesh of my flesh," Rei said, making a biting motion at Lilith.

The woman's eyes widened in surprise, and her face -such as it was- went completely slack. "A Communion? That would do it, if you don't mind damning yourself to an eternity of imprisonment. If you don't mind my asking, what did it taste like?"

"Chicken, actually."

Lilith shook her head. "Always chicken. Why does everything always taste like chicken?"

"It's a human thing," Rei teased, before continuing. "It's only an eternity of imprisonment if we fail to bring about the desired Third Impact."

"There's no 'we' in it, I'm afraid. It is for He Who Is The One to decide."

"He who is the...? Funny, that's what Unit One called Shinji..." Rei began.

"Not terribly surprising, it was either him or you. Only a Trueborn can be the One, though there can be more than one One"

>Lilith said, mostly to herself.<p>

"I'm confused. Just what do you mean by He Who Is The One,

>anyway?"<p>

"Oh, That's simple. He Who Is The One is the person who shall recre-

'\-/'

> SPLASH<p>

Rei spluttered awake, finding herself very wet, and Shinji very annoyed. "What the hell are you doing, you crazy fuck?" she demanded, beating him over the head a few times with her soggy pillow, not eliciting any reaction from him.

"It's about time you woke up," Shinji finally said, taking the pillow from her and sounding rather exasperated. "You must sleep the sleep

of the dead. I tried everything I could think of before I splashed you. What were you dreaming about?"

"How did you know I was dreaming?" Rei asked.

"You were muttering something about 'The One' or something"  
>he shrugged.<p>

She ignored him, instead looking at her alarm clock.  
>"Whatever. What the hell are you waking me up for this early?  
It's,<br>like, five in the morning, jackass."

"Training," said he, for the first time sounding chipper.

"Training?" she parroted.

"Well, that and your physical therapy. We're going on a run through the streets of Tokyo Three."

"We're WHAT?" she shouted.

"Going on a run. What? Don't look at me like that just because I let you off easy yesterday. You're trying to get stronger,  
>right? A run will help," he explained.<p>

Ritsuko poked her head into Rei's room, blinking blearily at the two youths. "What in the holy hell is going on in here?" she asked.

"This insane madman is going to make me run!" Rei exclaimed,

>pointing at Shinji, who was calmly appraising Ritsuko in her pajamas.<p>

"What? How far?" Ritsuko asked him.

"Oh, no more than a kilometer or two at first."

"Good. She needs it," Ritsuko said firmly, looking pointedly at her adopted daughter.

"I what?"

"You heard me. You've been lying in a hospital bed for three weeks. You need to get your strength back. Sounds like a good a way as any to me. Hell! If I weren't so tired, I'd probably be joining you," she said.

"So I have your approval?" Shinji asked her.

Ritsuko nodded, "Yes. Remind me about running tonight and I'll try to get more sleep so I can join you tomorrow morning."

"What about Misato?" Shinji asked.

Ritsuko snorted, "As if that lazy... I doubt if you could get her to move in the morning, let alone run."

Shinji scratched his chin in thought at this, while Rei looked

horrified at the prospect of doing anything resembling physical exercise. "But MOM!"

"No buts. You're doing it. End of discussion."

"Hey, Misato had some Basic Training, didn't she? Military instruction, or something similar, right?" Shinji asked Ritsuko, who nodded.

"US Army Boot Camp, yes, why?"

Shinji didn't answer, instead he squeezed past Ritsuko and headed towards the master bedroom she shared with Misato. Ritsuko watched from Rei's doorway as Shinji cleared his throat, then slammed the sliding door open with an audible BANG! "WHAT do you think you're doing, recruit!" he bellowed, in a perfect imitation of the sing song, deathly amused, US Army Drill Sergeant cadence, >enough so that Ritsuko almost wanted to come to attention herself,<br>"I want you out of that bed now, do you hear me, (MAGGOT)?"

Ritsuko heard Misato squawk, fall out of the bottom bunk with a thump, and say in a matching bellow, "Sir! Yes Sir!"

"You need to be dressed and out as of yesterday, worm! You have twenty seconds to be in your BU's and on that tarmac before I come back in here and shove my foot so far up your ass you'll be polishing my boot with your tongue! Are you hearing me,

>Katsuragi?"<p>

"SIR!"

"I said, 'Are you hearing me, Katsuragi!'"

"Sir, YES SIR! Drill Sergeant, Sir!"

Shinji ducked into his room for a moment, and came back dressed in a full set of American military fatigues and a camo hat perched on his head. He had a spare set under his arm, which he threw to Rei after passing Ritsuko in the hall. "Same to you, you worthless waste of flesh! Fifteen seconds, Move it, Move it, Move it!"

Rei took one look at the set of Shinji's eyes and realized he was, for all intents and purposes, exactly what he sounded like at the moment. "Yes, Drill Sergeant!" she snapped, then set about dressing down as Shinji turned to Ritsuko, who wore a rather bemused smile on her lips.

"As for you, Corporal, Kitchen detail! I trust you don't have a problem with that?"

"No sir."

"Good," He said with a genuine smile before sliding back into the grimacing countenance of Drill Sergeant Ikari, roaring:  
>"This is War, Ladies! Three Seconds, get your ass in gear!"<p>

Misato was up, dressed in a pair of Japanese military fatigues that

Ritsuko didn't even know her roommate had, and out the door in one quick blur, followed shortly by Rei, who wasn't quite finished buttoning her shirt, having her left arm in a sling and only one hand to do it, and finally Shinji, who exited with a shout of: "What the Hell do you think you're doing, waiting for the Elevator! Get down those stairs, double time, worthless! Hup! Hup!"  
>Hup! Hup!"<p>

Pen-Pen, awakened by all the noise, looked quizzically at Ritsuko, who was laughing to herself as she set about making breakfast. "Now I wish I had thought of that," she said.

Pen-Pen gave a confused "Wark?", then went back to his fridge for a nap. The Humans were weirder than normal today.

'\-/'

> Misato and Rei were back in half an hour, both panting miserably. Ritsuko raised an eyebrow at them, "Oh? Done already?"<p>

"He called us ...a pair of pussies... for being unable ...to run... more than a kilo ...and a half, and... he told us... to go home..." Misato said, gasping.

"Damn slave driver..." muttered Rei, rubbing the shoulder of her bad arm.

"So, where's the Drill Sergeant, Captain Katsuragi?" Ritsuko asked idly, setting breakfast on the table.

"Still running around with that stick up his... hey, wait a minute!" She suddenly realized, "Why the hell was I letting Shinji order me around?"

"Because your Drill Sergeant is a Pilot Major now, Captain"

>Ritsuko said with a smirk.<p>

"Great. Just great. Now he AND Kizuko outrank me.

>Wonderful," Misato groaned as she sat down to eat.<p>

Rei decided to not mention her Ultra-Violet clearance. She didn't want to make Misato any more miserable than necessary.

'\-/'

> Shinji jogged up the stairs to Kizuko's apartment, then knocked twice on room #408's door, continuing to jog in place. A minute later, the door opened, revealing a slightly sleep tousled Kizuko, wearing nothing but her underwear. "Ikari," she stated, then looked at him slightly askance, wondering what he was doing in BU's.<p>

"Yo. Wanna go for a run?" he asked jovially, feeling better than he had in days. Yes, exercise is good, he thought happily to himself, not forgetting to ogle appreciatively.

"Run?" she asked.

"Yeah. For exercise. It's good for your body," he explained.

She thought for a moment before saying, "Yes," and stepping out of



the door.

"Whoa, hold up a sec, you cannot go out running wearing your underwear," he said, Even if I would enjoy it.

"Why not?"

"You'll get sick."

"Then running is not good for the body?" she asked.

He paused, stood still, and blinked at her. "Running IS good for the body. Running without wearing proper clothing IS NOT good for the body. Is that clear?"

"I understand," she said, opening the door again. Or rather, >she tried to. It remained locked. She frowned at the knob slightly.<br>"There appears to be a problem."

"Problem?"

"The door is locked," she said.

"...You're kidding me."

"I am not."

"Well, crap. Do you keep a spare key?" he asked.

She shook her head no. "I do not normally leave the domicile without my clothing, school items, and other miscellany, which includes the key to this door."

Shinji sighed, then removed a small pouch from the many pockets of his fatigue pants. "Step aside," he said, pulling several tools from the lock picking kit. He began to fiddle with the lock, >while Rei stood guard.<p>

A young man happened up the stairs at this point, dressed in a security uniform of some sort, apparently getting home from the night shift. He looked at the spectacle of the nearly naked girl and the man in military fatigues trying to open the door of an apartment,

>and started to shout.<p>

"Do not interfere. Official Nerv business," the girl said.

The security guard blinked, swallowed his shout, and headed up the next flight of stairs to his apartment. One just doesn't muck with Nerv business.

Shinji had the door opened in a moment more, gathered his tools, and put them away. "Here, it's open."

"Thank you," Kizuko said, unconcerned with his skill at lock picking, simply filing the information away for later use. She entered her apartment and selected a pair of military fatigues emblazoned 'Ayanami, K.' in Romaji over the left breast pocket. She then collected her keys off the top of her dresser, placed them in her pocket, and faced Shinji. "I am ready."

"Then, let's go!"

'\-/'

> Shinji returned an hour later, breathing deeply. To Ritsuko's amusement and Misato and Rei's disgust, he seemed refreshed rather than tired. "I have returned!" he announced with a smile.<p>

"Welcome back. Did you have fun?" Ritsuko asked him.

"More than I thought I would. Is that breakfast? I'm starving!" he said, then set into the meal like a ravenous beast.

"At least his appetite is normal, though I can't say much about the rest of him..." Misato groused from the couch, sipping her third beer of the morning.

"Normal is relative to your perception," he said around his food, and then set his empty bowl down. "I certainly do not consider drinking alcohol at first light every day to be 'normal'."

"It's a medicinal fact that Rum gets your heart started in the morning," she replied, thumping herself on the chest with her beer can, nearly dousing herself.

"Then why are you drinking beer?" he asked.

"Because the Rum's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"All of it?"

Ritsuko could see where this was going, and hung her head as Misato answered, "Yes."

Suddenly Shinji stood, swaying slightly side to side, >seemingly soused, three sheets to the wind. He cocked a questioning eyebrow at her as he extended his right hand in a loose pointing gesture and asked, "Why's all the Rum gone?" in English with a mysterious, vaguely European accent.<p>

Misato looked at him oddly as Rei chuckled, and Ritsuko replied, "She burned it all to signal the English fleet, of course."

"Yes, but..."

"But?"

Again, the swaying stance, and the vague European accent, >"But... Why's ALL the Rum gone?"<p>

Misato still looked lost, as Rei snickered and Ritsuko groaned. "Okay, Captain Sparrow. Enough with the obscure movie quotes," She said, then thought of something, "You're probably the worst Pirate I've ever heard of."

"Yes," Shinji replied in English again, smirking, "But you have heard of me."

"Stop it!" Rei shouted, giggling, "It's too early in the morning for one liners."

"You're right. And when you're right, you're right. And you?"

>You're always right," Shinji replied in English again.<p>

"Oh Lord, that was awful. No more Mel Brooks for you"  
>Ritsuko scolded.<p>

"Okay, Okay, I'm done. Honest," Shinji said, then looked to Rei, "But don't you go relaxing yet. You've still got exercises to do."

Rei froze, then dropped her head and swore. "Damn it! I was hoping you'd forget!"

"And miss the perfect opportunity to torture a beautiful teenage girl for an hour? Not a chance."

"Sick twisted perverted psychopathic bastard," she grumbled as she headed for her room.

Shinji was close to follow, "Yeah, but you love me anyway."

Ritsuko didn't hear the reply, but from the tone, it sounded like something both angry and affectionate. She shook her head in a kind of fascinated wonder as she kicked her parental instinct to some dark corner of her brain where it would stop demanding she go in there with cookies and tea to make a nuisance of herself. That's when she noticed Misato still had that odd look on her face, "Just drink your beer, Misato. He was only teasing you."

"Yes, but..."

"But?"

"Why IS all the Rum gone?" she asked, in a fair parody of the English accent Shinji had used.

Ritsuko sighed. "Come on, Misato. I think we need to rent you a movie."

"As long as it isn't any more Digital Fireman porn, I'm game."

'\-/'

> Ritsuko pulled up in front of the 24 hour Rock&Bitch Video Boutique, and gingerly got out of the car, trying to avoid tripping in the cracks in the asphalt around the large footprint in the parking spaces next to hers.<p>

"What the hell happened here?" Misato asked as she got out,  
>eyeing the broken windows, knocked over shelves, FUBAR TVs; and the old, short, fat, and balding man in a business suit who was consistently vocalizing a slew of expletives that were all directed towards the 20 year old clerk who was busily trying to clean everything up. "Looks like a war zone."<p>

"Gendou..." Ritsuko sighed, clearly exasperated.

The older man took notice of them. "Sorry ladies," he grumbled, "We're closed. We'd have a sign up, but there's nothing to hang a sign on, as you'll notice. Please come back after the repairs are completed."

"You wouldn't happen to know of another video place with a comparable selection, would you?" Ritsuko asked him.

"No," the old man said, with a sour look on his face, "I wouldn't."

"Oh, well then..." Misato began.

"You could try R.S.T. Video," The younger clerk said, not looking up to see the glare the store manager was giving him,  
>"They're further up the street, next to the convenience store, but they don't open until eleven."<p>

"Oh. Well, thank you. I appreciate your help," Ritsuko said as she headed back towards the car. Once inside, she turned to Misato, "We have some time to kill, any ideas?"

"Just drive. Let's soak up the countryside like a sponge."

Ritsuko shrugged and set out for the C1 Outer Loop Line,  
>silently agreeing that a change in scenery might be good.<p>

'\-/'

> An hour later, Shinji was almost finished torturing Rei. She had completed the prescribed physical therapy for the morning (some of the exercises needed to be done three times daily), and now looked tired and grumpy. "Hey, don't go clouding over yet,<br>sunshine," he said sternly.

"Oh? And why can't I just lay here and suffer in peace?" she asked, being flopped lazily on her bed.

"Because we have school to attend," he said in a tone that implied the reason was obvious, so simple that even she in her current state should have known.

Rei weakly pulled her head up and peeked at her clock. The harsh red digital numbers read seven thirty. This caused her to groan as she let her head fall back onto her mattress. "You realize I'm beginning to hate you," she said tiredly.

"Oh posh. You didn't even go a quarter of the distance I ran with Kizuko. If she can hack it, so can you. Now, you better hurry up and get out of those sweaty clothes. Come on, Up. Up I said," he frowned, grabbing her good arm and hoisting her up. She gave him a disgruntled look as he unbuttoned her shirt and helped her take it off before he undid the back clasp of her bra with an easy snap of his fingers. He then turned around and waited for her to finish undressing.

"I'm beginning to think you enjoy torturing me," she said tiredly.

"You only think its torture because you're not used to it yet. Then

when you get used to it, you'll start to think it's easy.  
>Then I'll make you do more, and you'll go right back to thinking I'm torturing you again. I'm not trying to hurt you; I'm trying to help you. And I think you know that, but just like bitching too much to be honest about it."<p>

She grumbled a bit, but couldn't actually refute him. The truth was, she did realize that getting in shape would help more than anything; however she was also rather lazy and hated doing anything she didn't necessarily need to do. Besides, she did like to bitch. Bitching was fun. So, instead of arguing, she simply said,  
>"Turn around and clasp my bra, then help me button my blouse,<br>jackass."

He did so, then took her tie and tied it carefully, and helped her with her uniform jacket. "Picture perfect, and beautiful as always. Go finish up while I get dressed, and I'll meet you in the hall, okay?"

"Yeah yeah."

'\-/'

> The walk to school was uneventful. Rei was too tired to make small talk, and Shinji seemed absorbed in his own thoughts. And so it was the pair arrived to their homeroom ten minutes early, finding a few of their fellows already there, which, to Shinji's surprise,<br>did not include Kizuko.

He turned to Hikari Horaki. "Hey, Class rep, Rei's back."

"Oh, that's good news," Hikari said, looking surprised. "Did you complete all the assignments you missed? I gave them to your sister for delivery."

Rei nodded, set her briefcase on Hikari's desk, and fumbled it open with one hand, as the other was still too weak to use for anything, and was held in a sling. She then pulled out a manila folder marked 'Make Up Work' and handed it to the brunette. "It should all be in there."

"Thank you, Ayanami-san."

Rei took her seat, which Shinji noted was the one next to Kizuko's towards the center of the room, and a few of the milling students came over to congratulate her on her recovery.

Shinji sat in his desk, two seats behind Rei, kicked his feet up, and proceeded to stare out the window for a bit. His view was interrupted as a familiar matching black and white Adidas jumpsuit marched into his view. Shinji tracked his gaze up to that of the taller boy. "Yo, Touji. Good timing, I wanted to talk t-"

"Shinji, Dude," Touji cut in, clapping him on the shoulder with enough force to bounce Shinji in his seat slightly, "Yer awesomeness is only shadowed by yer ability ta rule!"

Shinji raised an eyebrow at Touji. "The hell are you talking about?"

"We saw your fight with the Angel, it was totally sweet"

>Kensuuke explained, holding up his camera. "We even got footage!"<p>

"Yeah, yeah, and dat's not all, oh no..." Touji paused dramatically before saying, "Dere was dis nekkid chick too!"

Shinji cocked an eyebrow at them both. "Nekkid chick, huh?>Well, now I know you're lying."<p>

"No, no, It's da truth, man! I swear, honest!" Touji realized Shinji was still looking at him doubtfully, so he motioned Kensuuke over, "Oi, Ken, roll that beautiful babe footage, man!"

Kensuuke handed Shinji the camera and showed him where the play button was. Then Shinji watched through the color eyepiece,

>ignoring the entrance of the teacher and the beginning of class as Hikari called 'Stand! Bow! Sit!', Touji and Kensuuke taking their seats next to Shinji and behind Touji respectively. After a moment,<br>Shinji whistled. "I take it back. Dat Dere Is Da Nekked Chick."

"Yeah, and the explosions! The swordplay! Shinji, you're so totally cool!" Kensuuke enthused.

Kurasawa-sensei stopped in mid ramble and glanced sharply at Kensuuke, then at Hikari.

"Hey, keep it down back there! Show proper respect for our Teacher!" Hikari yelled at them from the front of the class.

Kensuuke shrank back a bit, and Touji looked like he was going to shout something, but Shinji held up a hand, saying only,

>"Allow me," before standing up. "I'm sorry for their rude behavior,<br>Class Rep, Kurasawa-sensei, they were only excited by the fact that yesterday I single handedly saved you all from the brink of death again. I understand that the alien menace is so unworthy of your worry and so far beneath you that it doesn't merit your attention,

>seeing as how only a select few people are able to effectively fight against it after all, but the gutter trash here has noticed and would like to show their appreciation for being able to live another day. So sorry to have bothered you," he said, giving their instructor an even harsher glance than he had given Kensuuke.<br>Kurasawa blinked in surprise.

The entire class was looking at Shinji in a sort of horrified awe as he continued to stare the teacher down. Finally the old man sighed and went back to his lecture, muttering something about the youth of the day.

Touji looked at Shinji with a new level of respect. "Man,>you're one ballsy sonova bitch."<p>

"Thanks, I think. Oh, I was going to tell you. I talked to my Father about getting your sister into the Pilot's Ward on Sunday,>he said to have your dad call this number," Shinji pulled a slip of paper with Gendou's sloppy hand writing on it out of his bag and handed it over to Touji. "They'll make the necessary arrangements."<p>

Touji just blinked, and took the paper numbly. "But I thought youse said..."

"I told my Father about my concerns, and he checked with her doctors. She's not that bad off, just a few broken ribs with hairline fractures and several bruised ribs from where the rubble landed on her chest. I've had bruised ribs before, they hurt like a bitch, but it's not life threatening. Anyway, Gendou said he could hook her up with some of the experimental 'Pilot Only' medicine that makes bones knit faster, and she should be out of there in a few weeks, rather than the month and a half the docs want. What? What's with that look?" he asked, as the tough boy looked as if he were about to break down and cry.

"Man, they never even told us what was wrong with her, just that she'd be in the hospital for a long time recovering. I hate Doctors, because they always pull that kind of shit," Touji paused,

>collected his thoughts, and finally nodded to himself. "Ikari. I owe you big, man. I'll, umn... I'll..."<p>

Shinji raised an eyebrow, wondering what was so hard for him to say. "What?"

"I'll let you do my sister," Touji said finally in a hushed tone.

Kensuuke's eyes widened as his mouth dropped, and immediately turned to Shinji, who obviously didn't get the significance of Touji's statement. "Shinji, Touji is like anally retentive when it comes to his sister, and protecting her. That's like, the highest compliment he could give you man. I've never heard him say anything like that before! Hell, back in secondary school, this guy, Hiroyuki, he like, tried to hold Natsume's hand, >and Touji beat him within an inch of his life!" Kensuuke whispered fiercely.<p>

Shinji understood now, and asked simply, "What if I don't wanna do her?"

"Something wrong with my lil' sis?" Touji growled dangerously.

"No no, I mean, what if she doesn't want me to do her?"

"Then, no hard feelings, but I'll kill you," Touji said.

"No, Touji! What if she doesn't want to do me?" Shinji said,

>trying to get his point across.<p>

"Oh, umn, I guess I'll owe you, then."

Shinji refrained from beating his head into his desk, which was still missing a laptop, and instead patiently ignored the teacher like everyone else. Idly, he began wondering where Kizuko was.

'\-/'

> Gendou sighed, looking up to where Kizuko was floating nude in the Dummy System Core plug, transferring her worldly experiences through

the system into the hive mind of the Clones. They seemed more active than usual today, as some were swimming around within the LCL filled environs of their holding tank quite rapidly, others were spinning in circles, a few were even bouncing in place.<br>Finally, driven by curiosity, he asked, "Kizuko? What are you thinking about?"

The girl's red eyes opened slowly, and she regarded him for a moment before answering, "Exercise is good."

"Indeed, it is. Please, by all means, continue," he said,

>wondering where that had come from.<p>

Kizuko closed her eyes and continued communing with her sister-selves.

'\-/'

> The glorious interior of the 'Quick Stop Convenience' store was harshly lit by florescent lighting, which cast an unholy glow on the various snacks, food, and other items present. Behind the counter stood Yashiro, dressed as he was the day before, and before him, leaning on the counter was Angel, dressed much better than she had been yesterday, now sporting a green blouse, dress slacks, and a blazer, borrowed from their former hostess, Rei Hino.<p>

"I'm surprised you managed to find us jobs on such short notice," Angel commented, tracing a few Angelic glyphs into the counter with her fingertip as a way to waste time, "I mean, no ID, >no background, no nothing? You're something."<p>

"We have ID," Yashiro said as he watched her, seeing as there were no customers in the store at the moment.

"Really? Where?" she asked.

Yashiro took a wallet out of his back pocket, and handed her what appeared to be an American driver's license and a passport, >both of which had her name and photograph, and inside the passport was a worker's visa. "Where did you get these?"<p>

"When I got stuck in America a few weeks ago, I ran into Eblis," Yashiro began.

"You 'Ran Into' Eblis. Just like that? What, no preamble, >just 'wham', hello? You expect me to believe this?" she asked incredulously, narrowing her eyes at Yashiro. The being they spoke of was once known as Azazel, the treasurer of the heavenly paradise.<br>Azazel had refused to bow to Adam after man's creation, and God had renamed him Eblis and cast him from the heavens for that transgression. But rather than join with Satan, Eblis had become what Mohamed called a 'jinn', one neither good nor evil, and continued to stay neutral in the great heavenly conflict while remaining incarnate in the mortal plane.

"Okay, fine, he found me. Happy?" Yashiro asked pointedly, sounding annoyed.

"Sounds more likely to me. Does he still retain his powers?"

"Yes, as do we, to a lesser extent, which is why I'm slightly worried



as to what you're inscribing on the counter."

"We do?" Angel said, sounding surprised, as she finished her last rune. The entire string lit with a gold nimbus for a moment before fading out, and the counter shook slightly. "Oh," she said,

>sounding sheepish, "Ooops."<p>

"Jesus Harold Christ, what did you just write?" Yashiro asked plaintively.

"Oh, just that..." she began, only to be interrupted as a customer entered the store.

"Hey, give me a pack of cigarettes," the man said to Yashiro, then looked at the pack as the ex-Angel placed them on the counter, paused a moment, blinked, and then finished: "Gum. Give me a pack of gum."

"And the cigarettes?" Yashiro asked.

"No, keep the cancer sticks. I'll take the gum."

Yashiro blinked, shrugged, and said, "Fifty en."

The man paid for his gum and left.

"You were saying?" Yashiro asked Angel.

"I wrote 'Death dances over a smoker's grave'," she said, >looking uncomfortable.<p>

"You wrote 'Death dances over a smoker's grave', in Angelic, >on my counter?" he asked, and she nodded. "What the hell is wrong with you?" Yashiro shouted at her.<p>

"I didn't know I'd enchant the damn thing!" she said, then sighed, "I'm sorry. I'll dispel it after you finish telling me about your run in with Eblis."

"Fine. He's been here since the fall of man, so he's got contacts you wouldn't believe. I mean, imagine every criminal organization you can think of. He's got his hand in all of them, and then some. Now think of every charity, every public welfare, and basically good organization you can. He's got his hands in them too. >The guy is like the King Pin of the Planet, I'm telling you. Anyway,<br>Eblis gave me some startup cash and set me up with a fake ID. He said he was willing to help me as long as I more or less stayed a jinn."

She frowned, "We have to be neutral now?"

"I don't think he'd object if we went against the G.O.D. in a round about way, but I haven't come up with a good one yet. >Anyway, when I mentioned to him that this round two phenomena had been pulled on me out of the blue, he gave me a cell phone and told me to call in case anyone else got the same deal, and he'd make some ID's for them, too."<p>

"But when did you get these? And how'd Eblis get the picture of me?"

she asked.

Yashiro paused as another customer entered the store at this point, looked them both over, then said to him, "A pack of slim one hundred's, please."

Yashiro muttered something that caused Angel to look even more sheepish, and set the requested pack on the counter. As soon as he did, the customer's eyes bulged and he made a surprised sound,

>quickly shook his head, and said: "Never mind. Umn, I'll just take a pack of gum."<p>

Sighing, Yashiro said, "Fifty en." The man paid, and then left the store with a harried look over his shoulder at the cigarette box on the counter.

Yashiro just glared at Angel again. "I said I was sorry"  
>she said. "So how'd he get the photo of me?"<p>

"He dropped them off while you were in the shower last night, and there's a camera built into the cell phone," he explained as he put the pack of cigarettes away, "I took some photos of you at breakfast, Sunday. You looked half dead anyway."

"Ah. How'd he get them done so fast?"

"I don't know. Maybe he preordered or something? Let's let the jinn have his secrets."

"Yes, let's," said a rough voice from behind Angel. The girl jumped slightly, and turned to regard the speaker. It was a man in an expensive grey Italian business suit and a dark tan designer trench coat, a cigarette hanging lazily from his lips and a pair of very stylish sunglasses wrapped around his eyes. He practically screamed money. "Nice to meet you, Miss Johnson."

She winced at that, but sighed, "Thank you for the help,  
>Eblis. I suppose I owe you a favor."<p>

"If you insist. This is for you as well," he said,  
>withdrawing a thick envelope from his interior coat pocket, and handed it to her. "Within you will find pertinent records of your existence as an American citizen currently residing in Japan. Birth certificate, social security number, you get the idea. The envelope also holds a few thousand US dollars, which should be enough to tide you by until you get your feet under you."<p>

Angel was rather taken back. She tried to thank him, but he held up a hand. "Don't bother. You owe me, and as such, you'll follow the same rules I set for Yashiro, over there. One, remain primarily neutral. I do not want to see you two joining for or against the major conflict. As for the goings on here that resulted in your situation, well, that's a grey area. Try to keep it that way. Two, lead as normal a life as possible. I don't want to be involved with the police if I can help it. Just keep your heads down and your asses covered. Third, don't evangelize. There are enough loonies on late night without you two pitching in. Last thing this poor beleaguered world needs is a pair of god's messengers playing 'messenger of god'. I catch you preaching, you'll be seeing me real quick, and it won't be a happy

reunion. Lastly," Eblis said, turning to Yashiro, "Get me a pack of smokes. Marlboro non-filtered."

Yashiro popped the requested pack on the counter, saying,  
>"This one's on me."<p>

Eblis looked askance at the box on the counter for a moment before muttering, "Real fucking cute, bitch. Go bother somebody else." Yashiro raised an eyebrow at this, but didn't comment as Eblis pocketed the cigarettes. "Maybe I'll see you two around," he said, and then shrugged. "Maybe not. Let me know if anyone else joins the party."

"Right," Yashiro replied as Eblis made a shooting motion with his finger towards the security camera and disappeared.

"Wow. What a..." Angel paused, thinking.

"Nice guy? Gentleman? Upstanding fellow?" Yashiro offered.

"I was thinking more like 'Showoff', really."

"That too," Yashiro said, taking another box of cigarettes and placing it on the counter. He observed the box for a moment.

>Nothing seemed out of place. He picked it up and inspected it. Nope,<br>just a box of cigarettes. "Angel, trade places with me."

"Okay..."

They switched positions. Yashiro said, "A pack of cigarettes, please."

"Preference?"

"Just grab one, I don't care which," he said, sighing.

Angel shrugged, snagged a pack, and set it on the counter.  
>To Yashiro, the countertop flared gold for a moment, and then a small, three inch figure appeared seated on the box, wrapped in a black hooded cloak, a straight scythe propped against its right shoulder, and a cigarette protruding from inside the hood. "You know," said a feminine voice that issued from the small figure, "You smokers make my job easy."<p>

"Ah, Christ, Angel! You invoked Matrona! No wonder everyone's been acting weird!" Yashiro groused.

"I did?" Angel asked, and then said, "Shit. That's gonna be a bitch to clean up."

The little figure drew its hood back to reveal a woman of startling beauty, who immediately took stock of the two. "Sachiel and Shamshiel? First Eblis disses me, and now you two? What are you even doing here?"

"We got a free continue. Eblis says we're jinn now," Yashiro said, sighing, "What about you? Ol' Metty stick you with the crap job again?"

"Metty? Metty? You are so going to get it when you die, I swear. Metty!" the small woman cried indignantly, "You should show more respect for your betters!"

"Yeah well, let's have you die and see how you like it," he said with a nonchalant shrug.

"Metty! That's pissing me off. No, Metatron did not 'stick me' here. I needed to get out for a while, so I requested the job.  
>Why are you working in a convenience store?"<p>

"We're stuck here, we need cash, and besides, it's not like we have anything better to do," he explained. "Well I don't. Angel,

>shouldn't you get to work on this?"<p>

"I'm thinking, alright? Invocation was never one of my better skills," she said, frowning.

"Ha! Looks like you're stuck with me for the time being,

>loser."<p>

Yashiro began beating his head into the countertop while Matrona, Angel of Death, laughed at him.

'\-/'

> Deep within the bowls of Nerv, Fuyutsuki staggered for a moment, and leaned against a wall to support himself. Gendou stopped his brisk pace to look worriedly at his second in command. "Everything all right, Kouzou?"<p>

"I felt a disturbance in the force," Fuyutsuki quipped, "As if a voice cried out in bitter anguish, only to fall silent..."

Gendou just gave him that placid, half lidded stare before replying in English, "That bullshit is, and know it, you do."

Fuyutsuki sighed half-heartedly, "It's just my age getting to me. Arthritis in the knees, don't worry about it. I keep telling you I'm not as spry as I used to be."

"And I keep telling you we have ways of fixing that."

Fuyutsuki shook his head. "No thanks. I'll live to see the end of this, and that's all I care about. After that, I'm going to spend my remaining years on some island in the pacific, with beautiful women at my beck and call, and die a happy man. I give myself twenty years, tops, before end of story."

"You're only as old as you feel, Kouzou," Gendou said,  
>attempting to lighten the mood.<p>

"I'm fifty eight, and I feel ancient, Ikari. We've learned things no man should ever know, are in league with humanity's worst in a war against God himself, and we wrangle money out of the United Nations on a daily basis to fund said war. Hell! They sold Luxembourg to Bill Gates, Gendou! Doesn't that get to you at all?"

"Only that last part, and only because I didn't think of it first."

Fuyutsuki stared at him until he relented. "Okay, >sometimes, I admit," Gendou said, pushing his glasses back up.<br>"But then I go out and get drunk and laid, in that order, and proceed to forget about it for as long as possible," he said,

>resuming their journey as Fuyutsuki came up to his side again, "I suggest you try it sometime. Works wonders."<p>

"Oh, yeah," Fuyutsuki said sarcastically, "These old bones will get laid, all right -laid to rest. How can you stand to have such a flippant attitude about all this?"

"Because if I were serious about it, it would possess me and kill me in no time flat," Gendou said casually. "Either that or I'd make a monumental screw up somewhere and not have a backup plan since, in my heightened megalomania, I didn't think such trivial things were necessary because my evil scheme was sure to succeed."

"Now you're sounding like one of those villains in Yui's romance Manga."

"Well, she did point that out to me, once or twice. I mean, >let's face it, if God is the penultimate good, then I'm the evil overlord bent on world domination. The least I can do is attempt to not fall into that classic genotype and royally screw myself in the process."<p>

"I hate to admit it, but that makes entirely too much sense. >Since when did you start making sense?" Fuyutsuki asked.<p>

"Oh, ha ha. Laugh it up, Chuckle Pants. I'm serious. If need dictates I be evil, the least I can strive for is to be a benevolent evil. After all, my trusted lieutenant, we're doing this for the good of mankind, are we not?"

"So we have convinced ourselves, or allowed ourselves to be convinced. I haven't quite decided which it is yet."

Gendou shrugged. "Does it really matter?"

"Once, perhaps. It's too late now," Fuyutsuki agreed, >stopping in front of the door that led to the Holographic Council Chamber. He and Gendou slid their ID cards through the reader, and the door opened silently.<p>

"Once more to face the dragon, dear friend," Gendou muttered, only to hear his second in command chuckle.

As Gendou seated himself, Kouzou retrieved his comfy folding chair from its place in the corner.

"Ah, yes, Ikari. Good of you to join us. I hope you are prepared?" asked the age-withered voice of Keel Lorenz.

Gendou glanced at the various papers and kipple he had left behind on the desk before him and nodded, "I am."

"Then let us proceed. At our last meeting, Gendou, you were facing the Ancient Blue Wyrms in its den, along with Hans, the barbarian." The German representative nodded, "Kestrel the Sorcerer." At this the representative from Cagliostro nodded as well. "Fuyutsuki's necromancer, Adonis." Kouzou nodded. "And Eblis' >Jinn, 'Da'Hak'." He said sourly, as Eblis, the American representative for both the Steering Committee and Seele, gave Keel a thumbs up. Lorenz leaned forward, looking ominous as he announced,<br>"Roll for initiative."

There was a clattering of dice as Fuyutsuki settled in for the long haul.

'\-/'  
> Yashiro was not happy.<p>

It had been over an hour, and Angel had yet to figure out how to disenchant the countertop. The most she had done was make Matrona permanently visible to them, which had the dubious benefit of allowing them both to see and hear what she was saying to the customers.

"Coffin nails, get yer coffin nails here!"

"Hey, buddy, wanna buy some death sticks?"

"Complimentary matches? Oh, don't mind the brimstone."

"What, this scythe? No it's not a cigar cutter, it's a Soul Reaver."

"Hello, name's Death, Jack Death. I'm here to claim a lost soul?"

"That box is your ticket to the 'Soul Train'!"

"Call me cute again! I might let you die of natural causes rather than throat cancer at thirty-five. Why, thank you! You're so sweet!"

"Oh, I've got a light for you buddy. In hell."

And so on, for forty-seven customers, who all had come in, >asked for cigarettes, were taunted, and promptly purchased something else.<p>

Matrona was currently doing something she called 'The Dance of Death', which seemed to be an unusual variant of mambo that involved stopping after every few beats and striking a pose that resembled someone in their death throes. It was vaguely disturbing to watch, and still didn't solve the problem. "Angel?"

"I'm working on it!"

"Dun dun dundun dun, Erk! Dun dun dundun dun, Ack! Dun dun Dundun Dun, ouoo! Dun dun Dundun dun, Aiee!"

Yashiro slapped his hand on the counter, pinning Matrona under it. "Will you knock it off?"

"Ouuoo, I like a man that's forceful, except..." She paused,

>biting him. Yashiro quickly pulled his hand away as Matrona hopped up. "That man is not a man!" she exclaimed, pointing at him, "He is not a man! He is... A cancer merchant!"<p>

"I'm a what?" Yashiro managed before being pelted with a cigarette.

"Take that, you cancer merchant you!"

"Angel!" Yashiro snapped.

"There!" she finished her rune, and watched as the entire string lit with a blue nimbus, before fading. The countertop groaned in complaint, and Matrona stopped pelting Yashiro with cigarettes to shiver.

"Oooooouoooooooo... That tingled. Do it again!"

Angel screamed in frustration, which made Yashiro's hair stand on end. "I give up! I can't do it! Do something, Yashiro, >anything, just get rid of this twisted public service announcement!"<p>

"Have you learned anything from this yet?" he asked.

"Yes, don't write Angelic runes on shit. Also that Matrona is annoying."

"Hey!"

"You'll owe me," he said calmly.

"Don't care right now, just do it."

Yashiro shrugged, and quickly began scribing something in Angelic that Angel couldn't understand. It began glowing white even before he was done with it, and at the end, the entire sequence flared brightly, then shattered outwards. He looked to Matrona before saying, "By my behest, be gone."

"Oh, you think to order me around now, do you?" she sneered at him.

He squashed her under his hand again, but removed it quickly before she could bite him twice. "You may be of the Metatron, >Matrona, but you still must follow the rules. Your summons are gone,<br>now be about your business."

Grumbling, Matrona gathered her scythe and stood, dusting herself off. "Fine. It's been fun, tootles," she commented before disappearing, like a shadow exposed to sunlight.

Yashiro leaned against the counter for a full minute, before looking at Angel harshly. "Don't ever do that again."

"Yes sir." She said, quietly.

A white RX8 pulled up in front of the convenience store, and two

women stepped out of it. The leggy blonde in the black miniskirt, dark blue zipper blouse, and white trench coat said something to the temptress with the purple hair, yellow mock turtleneck and a pair of well worn blue jeans, to which she nodded,  
>the blonde heading for the R.S.T. Video store next door as the vixen entered the Quick Stop. Yashiro glanced at his watch. "It's eleven oh five, Angel. You have a customer, go open the video store."<p>

"Oh, I forgot about that. Thanks," she said quietly,  
>grabbing a paper at random from the racks in front of the counter and a key ring from next to Yashiro marked 'RST' before exiting.<p>

"At least pay for the Paper!" he shouted after her, before muttering, "Damn kid."

"New employee?" asked the woman from the cooler section as she eyed the selection of beer there.

"Yeah. We both are, first day on the job, to tell the truth.  
>I just think she has a few responsibility issues," Yashiro said,<br>looking the woman up and down from the corner of his eye. There was something about her...

"Just give her some room to breathe, don't cover for her mess ups, and she'll learn pretty quick. I know I did," Misato said,

>recalling her early college days with Ritsuko.<p>

"I'll try that, Ma'am," Yashiro said, wondering why he was getting the strong impression he should be doing something, like coming to attention or some such. He shook it off.

Misato opened the cooler and withdrew a six-pack of the current Kirin Seasonal brew, and grabbed a box of rice crackers.  
>Yashiro rang her up, "That'll be two thousand, five hundred and sixty en."<p>

She pulled a wallet from her front jeans pocket and withdrew an ID card, which she handed him. "Put it on that, please."

"You work for Nerv?" he asked, before doing so. The register accepted the card read and printed out a receipt.

"Yep, I have been for a while now. Saving the world and all that, pretty exciting," Misato said with a smile.

Yashiro wanted to melt. "What does it take to work for Nerv?  
>Any special qualifications?"<p>

"Not really, no. Why? Are you interested?"

"Very."

"In me or in Nerv?" she asked with a smirk.

"Both, actually, but I've only got a good chance of landing one."

"Oh? And which would that be?" Misato replied, curious.



"The job, Captain. Much to my chagrin," he said sadly,  
>handing her ID card back.<p>

"Smart man. You gave in a bit too quick, perhaps, but still.

>Here," she said, pulling another card from her wallet and giving it to him, "Call that number, the people there will tell you how to apply."<p>

"Thanks," he said.

"See you around, handsome," Misato winked at him, before exiting the store.

He looked from the door to the card, getting a very distinct tingle. "Oh, man... I thought we were supposed to stay neutral," he muttered.

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> Angel opened the door to R.S.T. Video for the nice looking blonde lady, "Sorry, first day, running a bit late," she apologized.<p>

"It's alright. I know how it is," Ritsuko said with a smile as she entered the store. "Since it's your first day, you wouldn't know where I could find a copy of 'Pirates of the Caribbean', would you?"

Angel shook her head. "No, sorry. Would you like me to help you look?"

"No, that's alright," Ritsuko said, waving the girl down,  
>"Go ahead and open, I'll just browse."<p>

"Okay," said Angel, as she finished the necessary arrangements to fully open the store. After she was done, she opened her paper. Ritsuko caught the headline 'Local Porn Producer Shot Dead' out of the corner of her eye before something else caught her attention. There, in the back portion of the store, the Adult section, sitting on the shelf, staring at her from the single doorway...

It was The Box: 'Fireman 911 Alien Rescue! American Cream Pie!'

Ritsuko narrowed her eyes in disgust, averting her gaze to the side.

It was The Box's Original Incarnation: 'Duke Nukem and the Fett Brothers in: Aliens, Come Get Some!'

Ritsuko felt her stomach lurch; it was drawing her ever closer in a sort of morbid fascination. To refrain from getting any nearer, she hastily looked to the next box over.

It was The Box's Baby Brother: 'Angel Attack! The Tentacled Terror That Tore Through Tokyo-Three! (wide screen edition)'

Ritsuko fell against the movie rack in shock, knocking one of the three down without noticing, "Dear God, they made three of

these?"

Angel looked up from her paper, curious. "Made three of what?"

"Only the worst pornography in the universe."

"Really? We have porn in here? Cool." Angel came around the counter to stand next to Ritsuko, and scooped up the box that had fallen to the ground. Immediately she began shaking, looking as if her sanity were about to snap. Then, almost as if a switch had been thrown, she calmed, said, "Excuse me a moment," and left the building just as Misato entered it.

Misato watched the girl go. "Hey, isn't that supposed to be the clerk?"

"Yes."

"What got into her?" Misato asked. She got The Box as an answer. "Eugh. Sorry I asked."

"They made three different versions of it, can you believe that?" Ritsuko asked, shaking her head in disgusted disbelief.

"Considering God sent us a real one? Yeah, I can believe it."

"Don't remind me. We have to dissect the ugly bastard tomorrow," said Ritsuko.

"We have to what? No way, I'm not doing anything of the s-  
>Oooh! Porn!" Misato was diverted to the back section of the store as Ritsuko exited it, sighing.<p>

"Fine, go ahead, ignore the true quest in favor of smut.  
>Sure, I'll just look for it by my self, no problem. Thanks for asking."<p>

"Uh huh, whatever. Ouuoo, this looks scintillating in a hot and steamy kind of way..." Misato began mumbling to herself as she shifted through the collection.

"Be sure to get something with real men in it this time"  
>Ritsuko commented as she continued looking through the rest of the videos.<p>

'\-/'

> "Look at this!" Angel demanded of Yashiro.<p>

Yashiro looked at The Box. He promptly began laughing.  
>"Hahaha! You were a giant fucking-"<p>

Crack!

"Owww! Son of a Mythos! That hurt, you know!" said he,  
>glaring at her.<p>

"You shouldn't have laughed."

"It's funny," he protested.

"If it had happened to you, would you still be laughing?"

"Yes."

"Liar, you lie!" she accused before stalking back out with the box.

"Methinks," he said to no one in particular, "I have encroached upon a nerve of vast penile proportions. I must endeavor to remember this in the future, as it did make itself known quite painfully."

A customer entered to find Yashiro nodding sagely to himself. "Uh, a pack of smokes, please."

Yashiro grabbed a box, set it on the counter, and appeared to struggle with himself before sighing and saying, dejectedly,

>"Score one for the cancer merchants."<p>

The man paused, and thought on that a moment before saying,  
>"Never mind. I'll just take a pack of gum."<p>

"Fifty en."

cha-ching

'\-/'

> It was time for P.E., and Shinji, finished with the first set of exercises and awaiting for the Coach to announce the next set, was seated against a cement planter-box, where he had a wonderful view of the girls P.E. class, who were swimming today. He was observing Rei's quiet conversation with Kizuko with interest. He hadn't the chance to watch the siblings interacting with each other for a good length of time yet. It was proving quite interesting. Rei was providing the bulk of the conversation, as expected, but Kizuko was actively involved in whatever they were speaking about as well,<br>contributing responses that seemed to encourage Rei to continue.

>Shinji wished it was a bit quieter so he could hear them. His hearing had been sharpened over the years of his training, but with the boy's P.E. class making so much noise, the quiet conversation was lost.<p>

And girls kept moving around them, making lip reading worthless.

He heard footsteps behind him, and a moment later Touji flopped an arm around his shoulders, asking, "Hey? Wha'cha lookin'  
>at, Shinji?"<p>

When Shinji didn't respond, Touji knelt, putting his eyes at Shinji's level, and gazed along the same line as his friend, "Oh!  
>Youse lookin' at da twins in dere swimsuits, eh? Whatareyas, some kinda poivort?"<p>

"You're the one drooling," Shinji blithely replied.

"Point taken. Which one ya like more? Rei or Kizuko?"

"Haven't decided. Rei's a flirt and a tease, but she's basically a

good girl. Kizuko's mysterious, and soft spoken, and she's serious about the Evangelions and this fate of mankind stuff,  
>but she's also pretty nice. How about you? Who do you like over there?"<p>

"I dunno. Horaki's got a nice rack, but she's da class rep,  
>you know what I'm sayin'? Kanazaki's got a great ass, she's a runner, in the track team you know? But I think she's got the hots fer somebody, dunno who..."<p>

Shinji let Touji ramble on about the girls for a minute as he decided to experiment. He relaxed, and opened his Ki long enough to look at Rei and Kizuko, before he closed his Ki again. Rei shivered, while Kizuko immediately looked straight at him, with a quizzical expression on her features.

Next to him, Touji had shut up, and was saying, "The hell was that? Felt like static electricity or someth-"

Shinji stuffed the middle and pointer fingers of his left hand in Touji's nostrils, which made said boy pause again, as Shinji then grabbed Touji's right wrist and proceeded to stand, making Touji move around like a marionette.

The girl's P.E. class immediately noticed. "... What in the...? Hey, look! It's Suzahara! What the hell is Ikari doing to Suzahara! I didn't know he had it in him! Look at the monkey! The Monkey! Suzahara's a Monkey!"

The entire class, except for Kizuko, erupted into hilarity.

>Raucous laughter reached them as Shinji left go of Touji, puzzled.<p>

Touji was immediately infuriated by the indignity. "Yo,

>Ikari!"<p>

Shinji ignored him; his back turned, still in thought.

"Hey! Face me, damn it, IKARI!"

The only reaction Shinji's actions had caused from the girl was a raised eyebrow and a disinterested turn of the head.

"ASSHOLE! I'm gonna pound yas whether ya face me or not"  
>Touji shouted, rolling up his sleeve.<p>

"Oh, umn, Let's say we're even now," Shinji said, finally noticing his companion's reaction to the monkey business.

Touji swung, his fist changing into an accusing finger pointing at Shinji's nose. "Ya ain't gettin' off dat easy! Ya're still gonna do my sister!"

"You're threatening me with your sister?" he asked,

>nonplussed.<p>

"Darn tootin'!" Touji said, walking off in an air of wounded

pride.

"Well... Damn. I was hoping to get out of that one. I guess I'll be threatened by his sister," he said, shrugging. He paused as another thought hit him, "If she's five, I'll kill him. Hey, >Kensuuke!" he called to the boy, who was still struggling to finish his twenty pull ups.<p>

"Yesh?"

"How old is Touji's sister?"

"Naasuhmee?" he grunted, finishing another pull up as the coach counted '12', "She's, Ug," '13', "She's," '14', "And a half."

"What? Fourteen and a half?"

"Yesh!" '15, you can do it, Aida!'

Shinji jogged over to the next part of the class, a kilometer run, and felt a little better about the whole Suzahara thing.

But not much.

'\-/'

>Nerv; Central Command.<p>

Ritsuko was at work, having been assigned the eleven to five shift.

Maya was in heaven. Well, she would be, if her console would just work right. She frowned and reentered the last line, >concentrating on hitting all keys correctly. Still gibberish. She sighed, shook her hands out, and relaxed before trying again.<br>Finally, the data entered correctly. "Damn console," she muttered.

"Try sequence forty two Bravo again."

"Yes, Dr. Akagi." Hyuuga entered the proper commands into his console. The Magi did as directed, displaying various technical bits on the Ubertron Mk IV Jumbo-Holographic Pit.

"Hummn... Still off slightly. Mark it for further testing, >and let's move on."<p>

"Hai!"

Ritsuko is so beautiful when she's in command... Calm and controlled. Maya sighed, taking her mind off her work and her eyes off Akagi before she was caught staring. "Mou... I want me sommaa that."

"Eh? Some of what, Maya?" Ritsuko asked, overhearing the comment.

Maya tensed a little, turning her head to look at Ritsuko, >her eyes wide. If not for her date with Ritsuko the night before,<br>she would have mentally screamed. "I... uh, Want to... To try some of that new coffee in the ICC vending machine," she finished,

>arching an eyebrow at Ritsuko. "Would you like to join me for one at break?"<p>

Ritsuko arched a brow to match Maya's. "I don't know. I've never been a big fan of canned coffee."

"It's really good!" Aoba said, lowering his manga. "I had a can of it not five minutes ago. Good stuff."

Maya blinked. Ritsuko blinked. Hyuuga sighed and went back to his debugging routines. Maya, perplexed, motioned Ritsuko closer.

>"Sempai!"<p>

"What is it, Maya?"

"Why do we keep Shigeru around? All he does is goof off all day."

"Well, it's hard to explain, so I'll just show you. Hyuuga!"

"Ma'am!"

"Run simulated error number four twenty five, would you?"

Hyuuga blinked. "Random board overheat?"

"That's the one. Did you catch that, Aoba?"

"Huh? What?" Shigeru lowered his copy of DNA2.  
"Sorry?"

"Good."

"Eh? Uh, okay... Whatever."

"Initiating sequence... Now," Hyuuga stated, hitting the return key. For a moment, nothing happened.

An alarm klaxon blared a short, sickening note, before falling silent, taking the lights with it. The emergency lighting cast a red sheen over everything as it came up, revealing Aoba's chair to be empty.

Maya looked about, then at Ritsuko, who was looking at her watch.  
"Where'd he go?"

"See the access hatch that's open on the floor there?"

"Yeah?"

"That's where he is."

The regular lights came back on with a resounding Clack.  
>Ritsuko nodded. "Forty three point six seconds."<p>

Aoba pulled himself out of the floor panel. "Damn simulation..." He kicked the hatch shut, walking back to his chair.

>"I hate it when you do those."<p>

"He's a hardware monkey?" Maya asked in disbelief.

Shigeru cleared his throat in a manner suggesting high levels of annoyance. "I prefer the term 'Solid State Engineer'," he said, sitting down to resume his perusal of manga. "I can read printed circuit boards like a cartographer reads maps, and I'm good at jury-rigging stuff we can't replace easily."

"He was working in R&D before Gendou noticed his unique skills, and decided having a qualified technician on hand for Command and Control personnel, should something go seriously wrong, was a good idea," Ritsuko said, sighing. "Of course, as he's devoted all his time studying the hardware, he's not as well versed with the software. Sadly, he lacks a certain amount of tact about that."

"Ha. I'd like to meet the slash dot they find to replace me.  
>No line hacker worth his salt wants near THIS place, they're too damn schizoid when it comes to government types. Job security at its finest, man."<p>

"I'm almost sorry I asked," Maya said, returning to her console.

Ritsuko's watch beeped, and she checked the schedule appended to her ever-present clipboard. "Ah. Come, Maya. Time for the hard work to begin."

Maya mentally kicked herself. "Yes, sempai."

"You two carry on," Ritsuko said to Makoto and Shigeru.

"Yes Ma'am."

"Eh? Uh, yeah. Sure."

Ritsuko and Maya relocated to the Science Station, the lowest deck on the three tiered command center, situated directly adjacent to the Magi, the consoles there optimized for faster data access. She was scheduled to go over some of the more esoteric research done at Nerv with Maya, and decided to start slow, and make sure her assistant was familiar with all the processes involved before delving into the really hard data. Maya seemed to be having trouble with the console for some reason. Ritsuko passed it off as a delayed reaction from the battle and the 'date' Saturday.

A half hour into this, the Magi verbally paged her.

"Doctor Akagi."

"Yes Magi?"

"You requested to be notified in two days time of our conversation on April eighth, twenty seventeen."

Ritsuko paused, considering. "That was the conversation regarding Shinji's Ki, wasn't it?"

"It was, Doctor. Would you like to continue this conversation

now?"

"Yes, by all means. Maya, feel free to save the data we were working on and take a break if you'd like. What is likely to follow will, well, be over your head."

"I'd like to stay if I may, sempai."

"You can, just remember I wouldn't feel bad if you decide to leave."

"I understand, sempai."

"All right," She smiled as she took a chair and made herself comfortable before asking, "Magi, have you extrapolated any further data on any of the Ki phenomena?"

"Yes doctor, our findings have been..."

Ritsuko was right. Within just a few minutes of the conversation with the computer, Maya had lost Ritsuko entirely. The Magi would tell her its findings, and Ritsuko would fire back questions, ideas, and just wild speculation as she thought of it, >and the computer would then refine its data accordingly, in some cases proving its own theories inadequate, in others disproving Ritsuko's, and in some cases settling on new theories which seemed a compromise of both.<p>

Maya didn't mind that she was lost in the conversation. It freed her mind for other pursuits, such as wondering why everything she tried to type today ended up garbled until she re-typed it, and contemplating how beautiful Ritsuko was. After a straight hour of discussion, Ritsuko sighed. "We don't have enough data for a solid theory," the scientist said.

The computer mimicked the sound. "Indeed, such a lack of resolution due to insignificant data is disheartening." Ritsuko raised an eyebrow at that, she'd never heard the Magi sigh so perfectly before. There was a pause, and the timbre of the voice changed somewhat, indicating one of the other three computers was taking the fore in the conversation, rather than Melchior. Ritsuko identified it as Balthasar. "Three votes of three to request more information form the source of inquiry."

Ritsuko sat up from her slouch. "An excellent suggestion.  
>Magi, please ring Shinji's school."<p>

"Proceeding, doctor."

A small holographic communications window appeared before Ritsuko's chair at eye level, marked 'Sound Only - ShinSeiki High School' as it began to ring. After a moment, it picked up.  
>"ShinSeiki High, administration office?"<p>

"Yes, This is Doctor Akagi Ritsuko, Director of Project E,  
>at Nerv calling. I need to have Pilot Ikari Shinji relieved from school for duties here at Nerv."<p>

"Right away, Doctor. Would you like to speak with him before I have him leave?" the receptionist asked.



"Yes. I need to inform him he'll be picked up."

"Hold a moment please," said the receptionist as pleasant music began to play.

"Would you mind going to get Shinji, Maya?" asked Ritsuko.

"Of course not, doctor. It's just that I don't drive," she said sheepishly.

"Oh, yes, I remember now. You told me last night. Feeling of extreme vertigo when behind the wheel, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I'm fine as a passenger, though."

"Well, go see if Garibaldi is busy and, if not, take him and requisition one of the vans."

Maya quickly got up to do so, saying: "Yes sempai!"

Ritsuko shook her head in amusement. If anything else, Maya was always eager to please. After a moment, Shinji came on the line,

>"Yo, Ritsu, what's up?"<p>

"Well, I was trying to do some research on Ki, and, to put it simply, I don't have enough information."

"So you want to pick my brains, huh?" Shinji asked dubiously, "Well, I guess. What are you gonna use it for?"

"I was hoping to corroborate with the Magi and find a solution for your electronics problem. We do need to contact you;  
>and in an emergency you're not always going to be near someone we can contact, as you proved last time."<p>

"Oh," he said, sounding a little relieved, "That would help.  
>Sure, I'll tell you everything I know, but I don't claim to be an expert."<p>

"I'm sending Maya down to pick you up. Would you be willing to allow us to run some tests?"

"I guess... You know, what you might want to try is call my pop, he knows all about this stuff, much more than I do, at least."

"Gendou knows about Ki?" Ritsuko asked doubtfully.

"Gen... Oh, sorry. I mean, you could call Saotome Ranma, my foster father. He's been studying Ki since he was my age. He'd be the one to ask," he said.

"Do you have his number?" Ritsuko asked, and then typed out the given number in a blank notepad window, "All right, I'll speak with him while I wait for you to come back with Maya."

"Okay. See ya in a bit, Ritsu," he replied cheerily, hanging up.

"Magi, please dial the number in that window and append it to memory under the heading 'Saotome, Ranma'."

"Compliance," said the supercomputer as another holographic window popped into being, this one marked 'Sound Only - Saotome Residence, New Kyoto'. A few rings passed before a pleasant sounding female voice answered the phone.

"Saotome residence, this is Saotome Kasumi."

Ritsuko smiled, this was Shinji's foster mother. She certainly sounded nice. "Hello, this is Doctor Akagi Ritsuko, from Nerv? I was wondering if I could speak with Saotome Ranma."

"Oh, of course, Doctor. One moment, please," she said, >apparently covering the pickup as the muffled shout of 'Anata!<br>Phone!' was heard. She then came back on the line. "If you do not mind my asking, this is not a call in regards to Shinji, is it?"

Worried parent, that's reassuring, Ritsuko said to herself, her smile widening just so. "Shinji is doing very well. He has adapted remarkably to the situation here, and continues to perform extremely well as a pilot."

"And at home? He has told me he stays with you, and another, >a Katsuragi Misato?" the gentle voice asked.<p>

"That's correct, ma'am. He's doing very well. He gets along wonderfully with my daughter, who is his age."

"That's very reassuring to know. He hasn't called for a few days, I was beginning to worry," then, in a hushed tone, "Is he eating well?"

"Yes. I'm thinking of having him do most of the cooking, >however -he's a remarkable cook, ma'am, which he claims is due solely to your tutelage."<p>

"Oh my! That little flatterer. Ah, my husband is here, I thank you for your time," she said, before a much rougher, though surprisingly just as gentle, voice came on the line.

"This is Saotome Ranma."

"Hello, Saotome-san. This is Doctor Akagi Ritsuko, from Nerv. I was hoping to ask you a few questions regarding you foster son's ability to, well, 'store' Ki, for a lack of better terminology."

"May I ask what you plan to do with any information I give you?" he asked, sounding a little worn, "Forgive me my caution, >Doctor, but the information you ask of has been used for ill gain in the past."<p>

"I understand completely, Saotome-san," Ritsuko assured him,

>though she really didn't know how the ability to single-handedly destroy small electronics equipment would prove very useful to anyone other than a espionage agent or covert operative. "The only thing I, and my colleague here, wish to know is how to stop its effects on

electronics equipment so we can give Shinji a cell phone that will work when we need it too."<p>

Saotome chuckled, amused. "Fair enough, Doctor Akagi. Ask away."

"Would you mind if I first switched to a conference line so my colleague, Doctor Melchior, can join us?"

"That's fine," Saotome said.

She watched as a small text message, 'three-way communications enabled' scrolled by on the screen she was facing before the Magi said, "I am here, Doctor, Saotome-Sensei. Please continue."

"All right, this is what we think we know..." Ritsuko began.

'\-/'

> Garibaldi parked the Nerv van next to the front gates of the School, giving Shinji and his entourage a look. Touji and Kensuuke had followed as par for the course, and Rei, flanked by Kanazaki like some loyal follower, had decided to see Shinji off.<p>

Garibaldi got out and opened the door for the kid. "Someone called for a cab?"

"Kinda obvious, ain't it? I mean, its only got da the logo on three sides," Touji said.

"Nah, it's got one on the roof too, for the flyboys"  
>replied the stocky man to the question.<p>

Shinji hopped in the van. "Heya Maya. How was the date with Ritsu?"

"It was fine," the young woman replied with a blush.

"I still can't believe you did that to my mom," Rei said with a slight frown.

"Oh, c'mon! You know she needs to get out and relax some.  
>She's too stiff."<p>

"Well, maybe," Rei said, eyeing Maya dubiously.

Maya did her best to seem somewhat worthy.

"Maybe," Rei repeated.

Next to her, Kanazaki was thinking, Her mom's butch?

>Channnnnce!<p>

"I wish I were going..." Kensuuke moaned in pitiable anguish as the van door slid shut without him.

"Dere dere, Ken. When ya grow up, you can work fer 'em."

"Really?"

"Yep, I mean, My dad works fer 'em, right? How hard can it be?"

Rei stopped next to Touji on her way back to class, setting a hand on Touji's shoulder. "Suzahara," she said after a moment.  
>"You try. You really do."<p>

"O'course I do," he replied, puzzled.

Rei just sighed and walked off.

'\-/'

> Shinji walked in on a virtual war zone. It was the lowest level of the command deck, a place he had never been before, and the Magi's housings towered above him like softly sleeping behemoths.<br>Ritsuko was pacing wildly, constantly followed by a small holographic comm window as she continuously asked questions of it,  
>and the Magi, and was answering as many questions as she asked.<p>

Shinji recognized the voice from the window. It was his foster father. Saotome Ranma sounded almost as amused as he was lost with the debate between the scientist and the computer, which he was referring to as 'Doctor Melchior' for some reason.

Shinji watched the Magi deliberation screen for a moment. It was flickering like a deranged Christmas tree. He'd never seen it do that before.

"I've never seen it do that before," Maya said from behind him, eyeing the same screen. "That's hardcore."

"What's it mean?" Shinji asked Maya, as Ritsuko was still ignoring him.

"They're deliberating faster than the speed of thought between themselves before ever speaking with sempai."

"Wow," he said, eyeing Casper, who's housing was next to him. He patted the case softly, "Don't work too hard."

"Don't touch THAT!" Ritsuko and the Magi shouted at the same time.

'\-/'

> "Hey, Ken..."<p>

"Yeah, Touji?"

"Pass da camera over 'ere, I wanna watch da babe footage again."

"Sure."

A few moments passed.

"Hey, Ken?"

"Yeah?"

"Did ya switch da tape?"

"Whaddaya mean?"

"Dis one's jus' static."

"Give me that!" Kensuuke snapped.

A moment passed.

"MY FOOTAGE!"

Touji caught the eraser after it bounced off of Kensuuke's head towards him, eyeing his friend worriedly. He had stood up and shouted that in the middle of class.

"Aida..." Kurasawa-sensei said, adjusting his spectacles.

>"Go stand in the hall."<p>

"Yes sir."

'\-/'

> Of course, shouting at Shinji to not touch the Magi housing had the undesired effect of him jumping aside, leaving him leaning on one of the data entry consoles. "Don't DO that!" he shouted back.<p>

Ritsuko simply barked, "Backup!"

The Magi got as far as to say, "All files safeguar-" before the freaky shit started to happen.

All screens, including the holographic Ubertron, started to wig out, displays starting to flicker and go off randomly, Strange sounds started coming from the Magi, terrible, horrible grunting sounds. Then, as if someone flipped a switch, music began to play.  
>The screens began flashing colors in synch with the beat. The Ubertron was displaying random patterns of light akin to Winamp's Guieess plugin.<p>

"Ooga Chuuka, Ooga, Ooga, Ooga Chuuka, Ooga Ooga Ooga Chuuka,"

"I can't stop this feeling, deep inside of me. Girl you've got me reeling, what you mean to me. When you hold me, in your arms so tight and you let me know, every thing's all right,

>IIIIIIIIiiiiiiiiIIIIIII, I'm hooked on a feeling! You got me Belivin', that you're in love with meeeeeee..." Sang the Magi.<p>

It was 'Hooked on a Feeling'.

It got as far as that before the power went off.

Ritsuko had been edging towards Shinji with malicious intent in her eyes, but when it went dark, she stopped quickly. "Great.  
>Just great. We're a thousand kilometers underground with no power,<br>and it's all. Shinji's. Fault!"

From much lower, seemingly issuing from the ground, Shinji said, "Well, excuse me! I wasn't the one shouting at people! If you know

what's good for you, you'll sit on the ground while you still can."

"And why should we?" Ritsuko asked, very unhappy.

"Because in under five minutes, your body will lose all sense of equilibrium and end up on the ground anyway, and if I remember right, that's a several story drop from us to the bottom of the Ubertron pit," he replied reasonably.

Maya quickly got down, and crawled over to where she had seen Shinji last. He didn't seem surprised or startled as she took his hand and sat next to him. In a very soft murmur, almost too quiet for him to hear, she said: "I'm afraid of the dark."

"I don't care for it much either, but it can be as much a friend as foe, at times," he replied in the same manner. She gave his hand a little squeeze.

"Count yourself lucky I can't see you to find you, Ikari, or I'd cut your appendix out right here with my pen knife."

"See what I mean?" he whispered to Maya, who giggled nervously. Then, louder: "Hey, I apologized! I didn't know I'd kill the Magi!"

Above them, Hyuuga and Aoba had not been idle. Shigeru was on his cell phone as Makoto was busy searching the small storage bin under his console. "Ah ha! Found them!" he said, flipping on a pair of flashlights. He leaned over, and spotted Ritsuko. "Doctor! >Catch!" he said, tossing one of the flashlights down to her.<p>

Ritsuko made a grab for it, but missed. It hit one of the consoles, briefly illuminating Shinji, Maya, and the exit, before rolling off and landing on the floor. Ritsuko snagged it again, >pointing it at Maya, who squinted. Shinji was nowhere to be seen.<br>Ritsuko frowned as Makoto called down again: "We've contacted Power! >They say the generators look fine; it was a shut down due to abnormal power draw that tripped the circuit breakers! They should have the situation corrected in a moment!"<p>

"Good! I want the power restored immediately!" Ritsuko shouted back, as Maya joined her in the small pool of light. >"Shinji, are you still here?"<p>

"Yes," his voice floated to her weakly, and she was unable to pinpoint his location. "And I ain't coming out that easily. >You'll maim me."<p>

Maya elbowed Ritsuko, and she gave her protege a hard look before relenting. "Fine. I promise not to hurt you. Come out."

"On your word as a scientist?" he asked, tentatively.

"What? Don't you trust me?"

"Not when you're angry, I don't."

"Shrewd kid," Maya murmured.

"Fine. On my word as a scientist, I will not harm you. Now come out!"

"Don't scream, I'm right behind you," he said.

Ritsuko turned on her heel, and closed on Shinji, pressing herself against him, staring him down like she had just been handed the Ten Commandments and Shinji was the golden calf. He didn't budge, and stared back up at her belligerently as she spoke. "You know about your problem."

"It doesn't really register until after the fact. Like when you wake up and forget to take your morning vitamins."

"You killed the Magi."

"It wasn't intentional. I swear it."

"I want you to go. I don't want to see you far a while. Take Maya with you so I can find you later, after I can think straight.  
>And pray, to whatever god will listen, that you didn't just kill us all," Ritsuko said coldly.<p>

"Yes, Ma'am," Shinji said, stepping back and grabbing Maya on his way out. Ritsuko glared frigidly at him all the way to the door. After he left she inhaled deeply.

She screamed.

From up above, Makoto squawked in alarm, while Aoba looked over the side towards Doctor Akagi. "Doc, you've got Lungs!"

Ritsuko stroked her forehead at that remark, and eyed the nearest console, which was blinking 'Invalid ROM. Please Insert Boot Diskette And Press Any Key To Continue'. "Now, to fix the Magi," she sighed. "It's a good thing Gendou's in a meeting, and Misato's 'doing' paperwork. Otherwise they'd be chewing my ass off"  
>Ritsuko muttered. "Aoba! Get down here and help me find whatever's keeping the Magi from booting!"<p>

"Down in a second!"

Ritsuko flipped the shield up to press the 'open' button on Casper's housing. It slowly began to raise from the ground, and she sighed again. "Just what I always wanted to do, crawl around through the toys in the attic..."

'\-/'

> Gendou had noticed the power failure. He couldn't help but notice it, being stuck in the pitch black with Fuyutsuki for three minutes. When the power finally came back up, he asked his second,<br>"Did you hear someone singing 'Hooked on a feeling' a minute ago?"

"I thought so. Why do you ask?"

"That was Akagi Naoko's favorite song..." Gendou trailed off, puzzled.

"Why would Ritsuko's Mother's favorite song be playing immediately

prior to a blackout?" Fuyutsuki asked.

"Hell if I know. Naoko did say once, if I remember, about wanting to hear that song one final time before she died. But she's been dead for a while. Maybe the Magi finally went nuts? It didn't take Naoko too long, after all."

"Think we should check it out?" Fuyutsuki asked.

Gendou shrugged. "We managed to get power back in under three minutes. Whatever the problem is, it can't be too serious. >Ritsuko can handle it, and if not, she can always page us manually.<br>Besides," he said, resetting the Holographic Conference Chamber so it would re-connect to the meeting in progress. "I want to finish this game of D&D."

"Lazy punk," Fuyutsuki muttered.

"Oh? I don't see you volunteering to go poke your head out."

"What can I say? I like playing D&D."

"What the hell was that?" Eblis asked as the two men rejoined the party.

"Brownout, reboot and lag," Gendou said simply.

Every member of the council said, "Ah..."

"Back to the game then," Keel said.

'\-/'

> Shinji pulled Maya into the lounge, and immediately sat down.  
"Ritsuko is scary."<p>

Maya nodded mutely, agreeing that a Ritsuko on the Warpath as a thing to be avoided. "You want a soda?" she asked.

"Sure, no preference."

"Okay," Maya replied cheerily, pulling her change purse from her pocket. She inserted her coins, mad a selection, and two cans rolled out. "Huh?"

"What?"

"I got two of them."

"Really? Try the button again."

Maya shrugged, and pressed the button. The soda machine sat there stoically. Maya released the button and turned towards Shinji.

>"Damn. I guess it isn't my lucky day after-" The machine made a grinding noise, and suddenly Maya was buried up to her ankles in soda cans. "Ow! Ow, that really hurt, damn machine!" She made to hit it, but her hand was restrained.<p>

"Let it be. It'll only shoot more at you," Shinji said,  
>eyeing Maya, and then the machine as he helped her out of the soda



mountain at her feet. "I didn't know you were a martial artist."<p>

"I'm not."

He blinked at that. "You're not?"

"No... Should I be?"

"Considering you're storing Ki like it's going out of style?

>Yes."<p>

"I'm what?"

Shinji sighed and explained. "...and so my body acts like a giant capacitor for Ki, which means free soda and arcade games, but bad news for computers. And the Magi. Which is probably why you've been having trouble with your console all day."

"But, I've never trained for that sort of thing. I mean, I was a Shiatsu Masseuse for a while..."

"Really? Can I get a massage one of these days? I'll pay."

"Nah, I owe you. It'd be my pleasure. Anyway, I trained in that, and computers, not crazy Martial Arts Ki Storing power. Why am I doing this...?"

Shinji frowned. "I think... Man, I wish Ritsuko wasn't pissed at me right now, I could use her input," he started to grouse.

"Oh, I see. My brain isn't good enough for you to pick?"

"It's not that, Maya-chan. It's just Ritsuko was getting all that info from my pop before I, umn, killed the Magi."

"Oh. Well, theorize to your hearts content, Shin-chan. I'm curious. What do you think happened to make me do this?"

"Well, I know for a fact that a piece of Kizuko's, umn, >'Soul', is stuck in Unit Zero->"<p>

"That would explain why she acted so different after her failed activation test!" Maya cut in.

Shinji was a bit miffed at being interrupted, but not much.

>"Different? Different how?"<p>

"She got cold, and distant, where before she was more like Rei. Well, she's always been more reserved, sure, but not like the isolated child she is now. It's why a lot of us feel kinda uneasy around her. Especially Gendou and Ritsuko. She's not the kid we all got to know. I think your dad really took it hard. He moved her into an apartment afterwards."

"Kizuko was living with my dad in his condo!"

"Until the activation test one year ago, yes. Gendou tried to keep

things as they were, but... I guess it got too much for Kizuko. She requested to be put into an apartment. Thing is, she knew she was hurting him, and couldn't stand it anymore, so she left because she couldn't think of anything else to do. Your dad didn't show up for work for a week after that. Then Sub-Commander Fuyutsuki went and dragged him in. He looked half dead. He stayed that way until you showed up. He's been a lot better since then."

Shinji absorbed this information in silence. Then he asked,  
>"What exactly happened during Kizuko's activation test?"<p>

"Unit Zero... The damn thing went schizoid after Kizuko linked with it, and tried to kill the Commander. We managed to stop it with the thermostatic plastic bakelite - that stuff dries super quick,  
>and is as hard as concrete-, but Kizuko's entry plug auto-ejected.<br>Your father, he went and opened the super heated hatch with his bare hands, to save her. That's why he wears those gloves, to hide the scars he received from doing that. She was okay... no. I should say her physical injuries healed, but she's acted like she does now ever since. How do you know her soul's stuck in Unit Zero?"

"I had a conversation with it on my first mission, it threatened to destroy my soul if I tried to pilot it without permission again. Well, Kizuko gave me permission, but she didn't give it to you. So this is what I think: I think Unit Zero knew I'd be pissed if it killed you, seeing as you're a cute girl who's a friend, if not a possible lover candidate, so it tore off a chunk of my soul and stuck it in you, and put a bit of yours in mine. I know,  
>I know, it sounds silly, but it does explain why you're subconsciously storing Ki. And a few other things..."<p>

"'A few other things'?" Maya asked, raising an eyebrow at him. "Like what?"

"Oh, aside from having this strange set of lesbian feelings - which mesh real well with my hetero libido anyway - I had this freaky nightmare last night. I was trying to write some kind of program, but I just couldn't get one part of the instructions right.  
>I kept going over it in my mind, over and over and over, and I just couldn't solve it. I finally woke up around four, completely exhausted. I've never dreamed anything like that before. I've never even used a computer before!"<p>

"That," said Maya, "is what we comp-sci students call a 'coding nightmare'. Sucks don't it?"

"Yeah. 'C code. C code run. Run code, run. Please?' Why do I know that joke?" he muttered.

"Do you mind if I ask what you were coding?" Shinji mumbled something, sounding more sheepish than was his usual. "What was that?"

"...trying to code a Nerv dating sim..." he finally got out,

>blushing. He blinked, and the blush disappeared as he smirked. "Why should I be embarrassed about that? Dating sims always looked cool."<p>

She smirked at him for that, then sobered. "Do you figure this, that is, our situation is permanent?"

"Hell if I know. I've never had a soul graft before. And besides, it's only a theory."

"Yes, but I'm inclined to believe you."

"Oh? Why?"

"Irrevocable data suggests," Maya said, then took two steps forward, grabbed Shinji, and dipped him with a kiss. It wasn't a namby-pamby quick little chaste affair like he had so far experienced with Rei. This was a Clean Your Clock Ibuki Special, >which had swooned many a college girl back in the day. Shinji's brain melted.<p>

After a brief eternity, Maya let up, standing him straight again. Shinji quickly sat down.

"...you are desirable," she continued, looking at him as she tapped her lip with a forefinger. "Besides, there's the Ki thing too."

"Oh. Wow. I think I sprained a synapse on that one. Thank you," he said, blinking owlishly at her with a wistful smile.

"You're welcome," she said, then paused, considering. "You hungry? I feel like a beef bowl all of a sudden."

"Beef Bowl? Point me in the right direction, if you would">he said, standing. Shinji's stomach gave off a loud grumble.<p>

"Cafeteria's this way."

Shinji followed her dutifully, but wondering all the while.

>Kizuko's question seemed far less innocuous now than it had yesterday, since this had happened with Maya.<p>

Was her soft-spoken 'Become One with me' literal?

'\-/'

> "It's a good thing you're not as literate with the software as Maya is," Ritsuko said to Aoba as they crawled around in the underbelly of Balthasar. They had checked Casper out already,<br>without finding anything, and moved on to the second Magi, in hopes of finding it there. So far, they were having no such luck.

Or rather, Shigeru was having no such luck. "Why's that a good thing all of a sudden?" he grunted as he squeezed his head into a small hatch to get a better view of the boards within. No drive bays, nothing there to indicate it was the problem, so he moved on.

"Because these sticky notes of my mother's are a literal gold mine of information on the Magi," she said. Immediately upon discovering the notes, she had abandoned her efforts of helping Aoba in favor of copying them into her palm pilot. "I might have had to kill you to keep these secret."

"Hey, if they don't tell you where the fucking boot disk is, >then I don't want anything to do with them," Aoba said tiredly.<p>

The truth was, they had told Ritsuko the location of the boot module, which had been pulled in an effort to keep anyone from accessing the Magi's information by powering them down and attempting to change the root admin password on boot up, which was possible to do if you knew when you had a two second window in which to do it. The module was located in the very heart of Melchior, >which was why she and Aoba were in Balthasar instead. She wanted those notes. "Nope, sorry."<p>

"If I ever find out you're lying, so help me, I might marry you," he said.

Ritsuko paused from her shorthand for a moment. "What?"

"To tell the truth, Ooof!" he paused, feeling around in a smaller panel before withdrawing his hand. "I'd always wanted to get in here, at least once. Just to see how these suckers were built. >It's fucking incredible!" he said, moving on to the next access point in the hardware. "I mean, Yow! That's live. I'm going to fix that... there, it's taped. I mean, these things were on the bleeding edge of bio-tech ten years ago, and only two of the three-<br>balanced Magi were built. This one, which was the prototype, and the final model, which is in Nerv-Germany," he closed that panel and moved on. "They went on to make the triple-partitioned organic storage module after that, capable of storing one personality matrix on each partition as opposed to one for each module like what we have here. They sacrificed processing power and storage space for 'efficiency'. That means less expensive, by the way. Idiots. I pity the people who have to work with those single Magi units in Nerv-

>America, -Ireland, -Russia, and wherever the hell else they are."<p>

"Anyway, I know the line hacker over at Nerv-G," he continued. "We correspond over the net about hacks and equipment fixes and stuff. The girl's nuts about this shit. Anyway, about a year and a half ago, something happened to their Magi system, so they had to send her and some software expert down in there to fix it. She sent me a full list of the specs for the final, and what I'm seeing here in the prototype is blowing it all out of the water. My guess is after they figured out how it worked, they went for the cheaper, less capable equipment, even though this set up isn't that much more expensive. It just doesn't make any sense to me."

"So, you're saying, if we ever got hacked by another Magi system, we could handle it?" Ritsuko asked as she continued her information gathering.

"No, I'm saying the Magi could handle it. I don't know if we could realize what was going on fast enough to do any good, but that's really your people's department, Doctor Akagi. If it were me, >I'd revise the 666-firewall program and create a fully autonomous firewall from it. I mean, the bulk of the code is there, from what Maya was telling me, but the project wasn't completed because it did what you people wanted it to do: it let the Magi stop the hacker cold

by unleashing its full intellect to work on the problem intuitively," he said, flipping on his back to pull himself into another section as he continued.<p>

"But that's all it does. Just keeps 'em at bay. If it were me, I'd remake the program to have the Magi counterattack, and disable it's stupid, self conflicting little brothers, overwrite their programming with ours, and then use the lobotomized single->Magi against the people who turned them on us in the first place.<br>Maybe even have it initiate a self-destruct. Boom!" he said,>looking at her with a smile. "Or just keep the slaved-Magi there as the best spy on the planet. Either way, a solution to an ongoing problem, rather than just putting it off."<p>

"You know, Aoba, I might just have to look into that," she said, shaking her head. "You finished over there?"

"Just one more panel, and I'm done," he said to her. "Hello,

>Balthasar's brain!" he offered to the half dome marked 'Balthasar 02' as he gave it a pat. "Don't fret. We'll figure this out and get you three up and running again ASAP."<p>

Ritsuko found herself looking at the guts of the super computer, wondering if that wasn't more than a courtesy.

Could the Magi be reassured?

'\-/'

> Kaji leaned against his room's second story railing,<br>watching the sunrise over Berlin, and conversely over the compact,>well designed surface complex of Nerv-Germany. He was still stuck in this country, waiting for a reticent Evangelion Unit-02 to test out properly so they could stuff it on the destroyer and get to Japan.<br>He felt drained, as if he had been gone far too long from his home country and its particular atmosphere.

And its people.

He checked his watch. It was 6:30 here. Give or take 8,900 kilometers over land and sea, it was 2:30 in Tokyo-03, Japan. He sighed, thinking thoughts of a woman whom he had left there, years ago. He wondered if she had changed, as he had changed. Possible,>but he doubted it.<p>

Misato was Misato, after all... He often thought of her,

>wistfully, as a force that could never be changed by anything short of a miracle. And she had already lived through one, once. Best to not tempt fate again.<p>

Soft footsteps fell behind him, and he turned his head slightly, switching his gaze from the rising sun to the western woman before him, in her own way just as glorious, just as fiery.>She was nude, and radiant, having risen after she realized he was no longer in bed. She came to stand next to him, wrapping an arm about his waist, placing her head on his shoulder, watching the sun with him for a long, silent moment.<p>

"You should get dressed. Someone might see you," Kaji said,  
>before placing a kiss on her crown of crimson hair.<p>

Her blue eyes caught his, and she smirked. "Let them see.  
>Let them gape open mouthed at my beauty. I don't care as long as I  
am with you."<p>

"I care. You might catch a cold."

She pressed herself to his chest. "And now I'm warm."

Kaji sighed, and gave up. She was stubborn, and prideful.  
>"Then let's both go back inside."<p>

"All right. I'll let you take me back to bed."

"Asuka, you're insatiable."

Shoryu-Langly Asuka rose to the balls of her feet to kiss him. "Let  
me have my happiness. You know as well as I it is likely to be  
fleeting at best. It may be childish, but let me take what happiness  
I can while I can, and you must promise me to do the same.  
>Time is short. I know you don't object."<p>

"Not seriously," he said softly, leading her back inside.  
>"Not anymore." It was true, he had objected when she had first  
approached him, two years ago. She was far too young for the  
relationship she wanted to have of him, and he continually rejected  
her. And then the hormones had burned off slightly, her intellect  
regained control, and he let her consider her feelings towards  
him.<p>

He hadn't expected her to hold him at gunpoint and demand why he  
hadn't taken advantage of her. That had been a sticky situation. But  
Kaji had gotten out of worse before, with less pleasurable results;  
and he now had a very desirable, intelligent,  
>sixteen year old college-graduate for a lover.<p>

Yes, there are definitely worse things in life, he thought, as he  
allowed himself to be pulled into bed. Definitely worse...

So why was he still pining for Katsuragi Misato?

'\-/'

> Misato was fast asleep in her 'office', a double cubicle space  
allotted for her within the empty, desolate cubicle forest that was  
Nerv Tactical. Ideally, the PR department should have gotten around  
to hiring more people to help unearth information on the Angels  
weaknesses, types of attack, battle stratagems, tactics,<br>and such  
to present to the Children, but PR was being even lazier than Misato  
at the moment and hadn't even finished hiring all of Third Technical  
Shift yet. It was annoying during combat, but a boon during operating  
hours. Here she could kick back, relax, and catch the nap she always  
seemed to be able to catch here.

So, she slept straight through the power outage, through Ritsuko's  
work to fix the Magi (which lasted three hours), all the way up to  
the point that someone placed something on one of the smaller stacks  
of paperwork on the desk near her head. Her nose twitched, cat like,  
as her brain registered food. The olfactory glands did a quick cross

reference. Nope, not instant, but not 4 star either (5 star was just too snooty in her opinion), fresh, hot,  
>steaming FOOD. Did we mention it was a beef bowl?<p>

Misato snapped awake, grabbed the proffered food, and downed it in record time. By the time she was finished, she was awake enough to take in her surroundings. Still the empty cubicle forest it always was, except Shinji and Maya were standing to her left,  
>watching her. "Good morning, Misato," Shinji finally said, "We kinda figured you'd be hungry by now. No one's seen you since like, noon."<p>

She checked her watch. It read 4:00. "Yeah, I got a little absorbed in my work," Misato offered without preamble.

"Oh, I'd say..." Maya trailed off, leaning closer to Misato,

>staring hard at the older woman's cheek. Misato just gazed back quizzically as Maya read: "Receipt of sale, one, (one) Luxembourg to Bill Gates. To be filed... That's all I can read."<p>

"Wha?" Misato said intelligently, before snatching the top copy of the stack she had been using as a pillow, her eyes scanning the document quickly. "Well, I'll be. It is a receipt of sale for Luxembourg to Bill Gates. When did that happen?"

"Last week, sometime," Maya said. "I caught it on the news.

>Something about changing the currency to 'Imperial Credits' or some such."<p>

"Huh. I Didn't know about that. What the hell is it doing here though? I mean, I always thought people were adding their unfinished paperwork to my stack, but this just proves it," She wrinkled her nose. "I don't even know what department this belongs in."

Shinji eyed the stack. "Well, you could always ignore it like you do the rest of this stuff."

"Hey! Good idea," Misato said, carelessly tossing the receipt onto the other kipple. "So, what brings you both down here,  
>other than to make sure I didn't die of starvation?"<p>

"We're bored," Shinji said with a shrug. "Ritsuko called me in here from school to do some research, and I accidentally whacked the Magi, which caused a brownout, and she told me to take Maya and get before she killed me."

"We've been wandering around ever since," Maya finished.

"You're shitting me. You killed the Magi? I think I would have noticed something like that happening," Misato said, giving the pair a skeptical look.

"Just ask Ritsuko if you don't believe me," Shinji said.

Misato picked up the phone and dialed Ritsuko's cell. "Hey,  
>Ritsu, Misato. Yeah, I heard Shinji fried the Magi. He DID? Really?<br>You fixed it and want him to report to the command deck?"

"Ask if she's still wanting to kill me."

"He wants to know if you still want to kill him," Misato repeated. "You what?" Then, to Shinji: "She says she doesn't want to kill you, but she might kiss you instead. Found something important inside the Magi when they were checking them out, or something. She's spewing techno-babble again..."

Maya giggled at that, while he just looked a little curious.  
>"Oh, but she says if you touch the Magi again without, umn, 'the fix', that she'll kill you. Just keep it in mind."<p>

"All right, I'll try. Tell her to make a 'fix' for Maya as well."

Misato did. "She wants to know why."

"Give me the phone," he said. She handed it over. "Yeah,  
>Ritsu? Unit Zero did a number on me and Maya, played 'cut and paste'  
>with our souls and she's sucking up Ki like it was a blue light special," he explained quickly.

"Well, if you don't feel like telling me, you don't need to spin a yarn about it," the blonde scientist said curtly.

"Since when have I ever lied about anything?" he asked.  
>"That's my honest opinion on what happened."<p>

"You're serious? Wait, of course you are. Shit. Hang on"  
>there were a few shouted commands to the Magi, to which they answered. "You're right, she IS becoming a Ki magnet. Get to Command ASAP. I should have a set ready for Maya when you arrive."<p>

"Okay. Here's Misato," he said.

"What? Yeah, she's acting a little off. Why? No. Hell if I know. Yes, he's still here, I'm sending him now. Bye." Misato said,  
>dropping the phone on its cradle. "All right, you two. Get to the bridge. I'll see you later Shinji," She paused, considering. She shrugged. "Hey. Good luck wooing Ritsuko, Maya."<p>

For a second, the technician looked startled, but then she straightened, and offered a crisp salute. "Yes, Captain! I'll do my best!"

"Good," Misato said as the two left. And she wondered.

Could Maya really make Ritsuko happy?

'\-/'  
> Ritsuko looked up as one of the doors to the Command Center opened. It was only Gendou and Fuyutsuki, however, returned from their lengthy meeting with the Steering Committee. Idly, Ritsuko wondered what a group of men could talk about for so long.<p>

"Report," Gendou asked calmly.

"Everything is green across the board, Commander," Hyuuga replied.



"Is the situation which caused the brownout earlier resolved?"

"It is," Ritsuko answered the question, which had been directed at her.

"What was the cause?"

"Shinji."

"Shinji?" he asked, puzzled. "A brief report, if you will,

>Doctor."<p>

"Yes Sir. Shinji was the cause. His Ki 'zapped' the Magi, >and something overtaxed the main generators so they reset themselves. The backups failed to come on line seamlessly, the cause of which we are looking into. After restoring Power, Aoba and I found it necessary to manually inspect the interior of all three Magi to locate and initialize the boot module, which had been removed. Aoba ascertained various previously unforeseen wiring problems, and repaired them all. We re-inserted the boot module and loaded the Magi's personality files from the backups, which were ninety nine point nine percent intact. Afterwards, I took steps to avoid the problem from occurring in the future."<p>

"Very shrewd, Doctor. Please report any anomalies with the Magi to me immediately."

"Yes sir," she said. He conversed quickly with Fuyutsuki, >who nodded and added his own opinion, before they left.<p>

A few minutes later, Shinji arrived with Maya. Ritsuko looked up to see him enter and immediately said, "Stop right there,

>Shinji."<p>

"Eh?" he said, doing so. Maya remained next to him, looking somewhat bored. Ritsuko tossed him a pair of small bundles. "What are these?"

"Bracers. One set is for you, the other for Maya. Based on the information Saotome-Sensei gave us, the Magi were able to create a new type of fabric which should resolve your problems with electronic devices when worn," she explained.

"That shouldn't be possible," Shinji protested. "I mean-"

Ritsuko held up a hand to forestall further comment. "We make giant bio-mechanical robots controlled by telepathy and orange goo to fight a Divine menace bent on the destruction of its fan->base. Don't tell me what isn't possible, Shin-chan. Just accept it.<br>Put it on, and we'll test it."

Shinji shrugged, and opened his bundle to reveal a set of bracers, an odd bluish-grey in color, and slightly metallic to the touch. He quickly affixed them to his forearms, and turned to show Maya how. Once outfitted, Ritsuko tossed him Hyuuga's cell phone.

>"Hey!" the technician protested.<p>

"We'll get you a new one if he breaks it. Shinji, Dial the following..." Ritsuko said, giving him a string of numbers, "and press the send button. It should be green."

Shinji did so, then held the strangely familiar-unfamiliar device to his ear and waited. A voice he recognized picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Oh, hey Rei."

"Shinji? Why are you calling me on my cell?" she asked,  
>clearly perplexed.<p>

"Your mom said to call using a cell phone, so I did."

"Oh. I take it you're still at Nerv?"

"Yep. Should be home in time for dinner, though."

"Okay. I'll cook tonight, and be expecting all of you around five thirty. Do try to make it on time, all right?"

"Will do. Later Rei," he finished his call and hit the 'End'

>button without thinking about it, tossing the phone back to Hyuuga.<br>"Okay, I can use cell phones now without them blowing up. That's cool."

Ritsuko nodded. "Cell phones, computers, anything electronic. As long as you're wearing those bracers, your Ki cannot leak into hand held electronics. You could still cause a malfunction if you trip on something, or kick something, though. Do try to keep it in mind," she said, before turning to Maya. "I hear you've started doing the same thing for some bizarre reason?"

"Yes, sempai. I can't help it. Shinji thinks Unit Zero had something to do with it."

"Wouldn't surprise me. Damn thing's ornery as hell. Watch your feet at the consoles. And if I catch you in here without those bracers, I'll kill you with my pen. The same goes to you, Shinji. I don't want to see you out of those for anything less than a shower and not for more than five minutes if you can help it."

"Gotcha. Besides, they are a nifty spring accessory," he quipped.

"We should be able to change the color after some further testing. I just wanted to have something now as opposed to later if I could help it. I'm just glad they seem to work properly," She stopped, and suddenly remembered something. "Oh, by the way. I still want to run those tests I spoke of earlier..."

Suddenly Shinji wondered if skipping class for Nerv had been a wise choice after all, as the gleam in Ritsuko's eyes was somewhat scary.

But hey, it was only a test right? It couldn't hurt. Right?

'\-/'

>An hour later, in a medical room in the Pilot's Ward, Nerv Hospital.<p>

"Ouch! Damn it, that hurts, you know! How many needles do you have in here? Christ!"

Ritsuko just smirked at him as she injected the latest sample into a vacuum-sealed vial. "Oh, hush. You are a man, right?"  
>You should bear this small pain stoically."<p>

"The needle's a meter long! How can I bear that stoically"  
>he protested.<p>

"It's only sixty five millimeters. Stop squirming."

"That's big enough, I tell you! Look, Rei's expecting us about now. Can we just go?"

Ritsuko considered. There were a few tests she'd still like to run, but it could wait until tomorrow. "All right, all right. I concede to your violent protests. We can go home."

"Good."

"But tomorrow you get to do more."

"Damn it."

Ritsuko tousled his hair affectionately. "Cheer up, my favorite guinea pig, it only hurts for a bit."

He scowled at her as he put his shirt back on. "Yeah, so you say. You get stuck with one of those and see if you like it."

She just chuckled at him. "Let's gather our wayward Captain and go home."

'\-/'

> The next morning, Shinji had his revenge for the needles.<br>Ritsuko was as badly out of shape as Rei and Misato, and he drove them mercilessly for four kilometers. Strangely, she didn't seem to mind too much. Shinji decided it was just her intellect knowing what was good for her, and left it at that.

After going for a full run with Kizuko again, he came home and began helping Rei with her therapy. Afterwards they left for and arrived at school, and sat through another boring, inaccurate lecture about the second impact. The school had replaced Shinji's red, government issue laptop, and he proceeded to entertain himself by exploring the part of him he had labeled the 'Maya Skill-Set'.  
>His new knowledge was actually very comprehensive, and the more he explored the little subtleties of the technical information, the more he began to grasp.<p>

Idly he wondered if it would work the same for Maya with his Martial arts skills. He really needed a training partner that was decent. And while he realized he would never be up to Maya's real skill with computers without further instruction, he was pretty sure he could trick her body into learning what he knew of the art.

Well, most of it, anyway. There were some techniques that could only be handed down to a disciple of the Saotome School of Anything Goes Martial Arts. He'd only show her those if she wanted to commit herself, to which he doubted. After all, he didn't know if she would even want to learn in the first place.

He was thinking this as a message popped up on his screen from Kensuuke. 'Did you record over the footage on my camera yesterday?' it asked.

'No. Why, was it erased?'

'Yeah, the film is totally blank now. I had transferred it to a DVD the night before, so it's not a big loss. I was just wondering why it would have been blank.'

Shinji typed in his explanation on Ki and hand held electronics.

"No Way!" Kensuuke said loudly after reading it.

Touji leaned his head back to look at his geeky friend, just like the other kids who were all staring at him, including the teacher. "Dude, Ken, dat's da second time in two days, man."

"Aida, go stand in the hall for the next period."

Kensuuke sighed. "Yes sir."

Shinji offered a soft apology as Kensuuke passed. The other boy just waved him off. Unconcerned, Shinji went back to playing with the laptop.

'\-/'

> Yashiro eyed the card he had received from Captain Katsuragi.<p>

Nerv. Go to work for Nerv. The idea appealed to him, and yet disquieted him at the same time. He could easily throw a wrench into GOD's plans this way, but GOD would know he was giving them the information anyway, and would probably change things accordingly.

>Then again, if he didn't offer his services and knowledge, GOD would know, and stick to the original plan anyway, of which he knew a little about. But if he told someone, then GOD would know, and would change things accordingly, just as if he had gone to work there anyway. But what if he didn't do anything at all?<p>

"I'd feel like a patsy, that's what," he muttered to the empty store.

It was like time travel, he mused. You knew you could change something, but would that something change the events you remembered, or was the change you made the cause of the events you knew happened? What if you didn't do anything, but told someone else anonymously? What if...

His brain went into circles on that for a while before he stopped it, and shouted, "I hate time travel!"

A few boxes rattled off the shelves at this. Sighing, the jinn went

and picked them up, placing them back on the rack. He never saw, or heard the two well dressed gentlemen who appeared as if from nowhere. One was carrying a three foot segment of a 2x4. He proceeded to apply it to good effect on the back of Yashiro's skull.

>The jinn dropped cold.<p>

The man without the 2x4 turned to his twin, and said in a rough sounding voice, "Bolas. Take this coat and go get his motorcycle."

"That game is old, Jay. I swear. OLD," his companion said tiredly, hoisting the plank of wood on his shoulder.

"I liked it, Gee. I really did."

"Jesus. Can we get on with this? We have more important things to do."

"Fine, fine. Spoil my fun," Jay sighed, shaking his head. He knelt next to the former Angel and cupped a hand to his mouth. "Hey,

>Sachiel. You're going to work for Nerv, and you're going to like it.<br>Take Shamshiel-Angel with you, and the others, when they show up.

>Oh, your resurrection was my doing, not the G.O.D.'s, so expect this plan to be screwy as hell. Now, wake up!" he shouted the last part,<br>and Yashiro awoke with a start.

He blinked, and looked around. There was no one there.

>Funny, he must have slipped or something. He picked himself up off the floor and bought some aspirin. After fighting with the raging headache and the nagging sensation he now felt for the card, he picked up the phone and dialed the number.<p>

"Hello? Yes, I was wondering how to apply for a job at Nerv?"

'\-/'

> "Why are we doing this?" Angel asked as she filled out the application for employment the woman behind the desk had given her.<p>

"Because I told you to do this. Now, be quiet and do your forms," Yashiro said tiredly. It was obvious he wasn't extremely thrilled to be here either.

"No, I mean, why are we trying to gain employment with Nerv?

>I mean, it seems kinda counter-productive. First we try to kill them, now we're going to help them? What's up with that?"<p>

"Keep your voice down, or speak in Angelic or something," he said, switching languages himself. "Look, all I know is when the boy and the ghost come knocking on your skull with a plank of wood, you listen."

She glanced sharply at him. "You're telling me Jesus and H.

>G. Christ came by the Quick Stop today, and told you to join Nerv?"<p>

"Yes."

"Why didn't they come and tell me?" she asked, gesturing wildly in her frustration. "I would have asked them why we're like this! What's the plan, and what the hell were they thinking?"

"That's probably why they decided to hit me over the head with the holy two by four and not you, Angel. Now, finish your forms."

She continued filling out her forms dutifully, only griping every so often, until she came to the last page. "What? There's a physical involved?"

"Yes. Physical examination, blood work, various samples, you name it -they want to do it. C'mon, squirt, time to turn your head and cough."

"I'm so going to hurt someone after this. I swear."

'\-/'

> Ritsuko had lived up to her promise of more tests. Luckily,<br>they had gone far smoother than the last batch, and now Shinji, Rei,

>and Kizuko were scheduled for synch tests with the Evangelions.<p>

Shinji and Rei were up first, in Units -00 and -01 respectively, as Kizuko's patience exceeded Rei's by a wide margin.

>"All right, Shinji, I want you to focus on entering a meditative state, and try to feel as if the Eva were a part of you."<p>

He seemed to cringe at that analogy. "Can I imagine it as a suit of armor I can wear when the need arises, instead?" he asked.

Ritsuko nodded. "Whatever works for you is fine," She said,

>marking on her clipboard that he seemed very relieved to hear this.<br>"Now, Rei, I want to see if you can move the Evangelion's left arm..."

Shinji closed the comm window and relaxed inside the Entry Plug. He had quickly grown accustomed to the plug suit, so it wasn't as difficult as it could have been. But, instead of following Ritsuko's advice, he tried to contact the portion of Kizuko's soul that was still within the hulking form of Unit-00. He mentally called her name a few times. When that didn't work, he tried imagining her in front of him, in that red sea. Sadly, that didn't work either. Frustrated, he smacked the controls a bit, and sent a 'ping' of Ki at the Unit.

That got a response. With a moaning sound, the shorn portion of Kizuko's soul entered his mind, and he was once again within that eerie, red landscape. Again, the nude Kizuko stood before him,

>except this time she was grinning. "You make us feel Alive," she said, "and real. You call to us. What is it you want, He Who Is The One?"<p>

"Answers," he said. "Answers to a few questions."

"And what makes you think we would answer?"

"Because you like me."

While she didn't reply verbally to that, her grin became wider. "What are your questions, He Who Is The One?"

"Did you take a bit of my soul and stick it in Maya, and vice versa?"

"Yes. Would you rather we had destroyed her?" Unit-00 asked,

>raising an eyebrow at him.<p>

"No. I just wanted to make sure that's what it was."

"What other questions did you have for us, He Who Is The One?" Unit-00 asked without preamble.

"The other day, I asked Kizuko if she would have sex with me. She replied by asking if I would like to 'Become One' with her.  
>This entire thing with Maya has got me wondering if that was literal or not."<p>

"You should be asking her this, not I," Unit-00 said,  
>sounding more like a lonely fourteen year old than it had previously. Shinji briefly wondered at the difference as it continued. "But yes, it can be that. It can be as meaningful as you desire it to be. Yes, it can be literal, for she knows how."<p>

"Oh. Umn, I'll keep that in mind. Thanks."

"Is there anything else?"

"Oh, what do you mean by calling me 'He Who Is The One'  
>Shinji asked. "I mean, it sounds like a B-movie quote or something."<p>

She opened her mouth to speak, but then paused, as if listening to something. "It is not our place to tell you. Yet. There may come a time when we may speak of this, but that time has yet to pass. Know that you have an important role to play in this conflict,  
>as do we, as do the others. Ask the Lord of the Elements for the proper time to ask, and at that time we shall tell you what we know."<p>

"Who the hell is the 'Lord of Elements'?"

"Now that," said Unit-00 mischievously, "is a secret."

'\-/'

> Gendou was puzzled. He generally attempted to not be puzzled, as in the business of saving the world, the more puzzled you are, the less likely you were to succeed. But in this case.<br>Well, it was permissible to be puzzled.

Within the copies of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other various prophetic works Seele had handed over as research material for Project E, there had been several sheets of papyrus vellum inserted to some of the works via resin glue, as if included as an afterthought by the original authors. They had been discredited by Seele because of their odd rambling and apparent lack of context with the rest of the

scriptures; nonetheless Gendou had read through them on a whim, and now it would seem at least one had come true.

He re-read the verse he found suspect again, just to be sure. 'There will be an owner of vast land and sheep and goods and servants who shall fall upon harsh times, with his hand forced he shall sell his goods to his neighbor, much to the dismay of the children of the nation whom love him and his good works. His servants shall do the bidding of this new master for a time, for the land owner shall regain his title, his lands, his sheep, his goods, >and reclaim his servants to tend his fields again, much to the surprise and wonderment of the children whom love him. So too shall the defeated agents of God come under the guise of the servants of the land owner, to be placed as servants under the one whom dealt them death's blow, to serve until the time they taste of death once more. And there shall be a great buying of the rainbow discs and much rejoicing, so sayth the Lord. Even if he IS speaking nonsense...' and further down, in a shuddering script, as if the author were experiencing great difficulty, '-Note, never sayth that again, as lightning is painful.'

Gendou looked from the prophecy to the applications for employment and accompanying dossiers on his desk. Yashiro Futaba, >Male, 22; and Angel Johnson, Female, 21. "I would never have called SNK a 'Land Owner' myself, but..." he sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose, "Stupid prophets and their stupid parables and with their stupid analogies."<p>

There came a knock on his massive office door. "Come."

It was Ritsuko, with written reports on the Children's Synchrograph tests for his perusal. She took one look at him and raised an eyebrow. "Okay, what else has gone wrong?"

"Else?" he asked, arching a brow to match her own.

"It's nothing major, just that Rei's synch ratio has dropped ten points, and she's unable to move the Evangelion's left arm, >which I expected anyway. What's eating you?"<p>

"Of the information we used to predict the Angel's arrival, >it has come to my attention that certain portions have just been proven to be true, whereas the steering committee and myself had viewed them previously as questionable... at best," he said wearily,<br>leaning back in his chair and rotating from side to side slightly.

"Questionable? Why?"

"They were written on, well... 'Sticky Notes'," he said,

>shrugging, "Which doesn't lend well to their credibility."<p>

"Bullshit," Ritsuko said, slamming her reports on his desk with a pronounced slapping sound.

"I beg your pardon?" Gendou asked, a bit surprised at the look his chief scientist was giving him, as if he had crossed some invisible line, or perhaps attempted to invalidate some irrefutable truth.



She remained in her pose, left hand on his desk, the other propped on her hip as she stared at him from under her brows, "Never doubt the information contained in sticky notes," she said, and at his lack of comprehension, she elaborated, "Have you ever looked inside the Magi's manual access tunnels?" she asked, to which he shook his head no. "Well, if you HAD, you would find them littered with sticky notes, just absolutely covered. My mother placed them there as she worked, and they're filled with hidden access codes, >personal notes, file locations, hardware access routes, terminal points, all sorts of invaluable data which I would never have known existed if she hadn't left them there for her successor to find. It was the only good thing to come of Shinji's run in with the Magi. So never, ever distrust sticky notes, 'cause sometimes, they're the only thing you've got that has any truth on them at all."<p>

And with that, Ritsuko left the office, leaving Gendou to puzzle over her words. After a few minutes, he shrugged, got out the big rubber stamp, and stamped both applications with a big glaring red 'HIRED'. He then picked up the phone and dialed Fuyutsuki, who was awaiting his decision.

"Kouzou? Yes, well, I hope I don't regret this, but I need you to personally hire two people. Yes, they'll be in the groundside personnel department. Oh, I think they're already there. Yes, I'll have the dossiers available for you when you arrive..."

\-/'

> Fuyutsuki had arrived in the topside personnel office, taken a look at the applicants, and then their dossiers. His eyes widened in surprise, and he excused himself into a small office adjacent to the reviewing room and quickly dialed Gendou. "What's the meaning of hiring these two...?"<p>

"Well, they're the reincarnated Angels, Kouzou-"

"They're WHAT?" Fuyutsuki said in alarm, causing the two applicants to look to the door of the small office he was in for a moment before quickly looking elsewhere. Kouzou regained his composure as Gendou continued.

"You heard me, old man. They're the Angels. They're also hired."

"But we have reason to suspect they might-!"

"Yes, Yes. It might cause a few foreseen difficulties with the Human Completion Project, but the risks are worth it. Just think of it as 'defecting'," Gendou said calmly.

"Defecting my ass."

"Look, according to the, uh, 'Sticky Notes' in the Germonik scriptures, this was a possibility. You've read them."

"Yes, but according to Ramza the Forgotten, their truth is a double edged sword which can turn on us as easily as it does our enemies."

"As long as we can keep in mind that everything they can reveal to us

is already known by Him, and suppress any false sense of security their information might give us, we should be fine"

>Gendou said. "If there are any problems, we can just fire them.<br>Until then, put them on the payroll. I'd prefer to have them and their brethren where I can keep an eye on them rather than in the hands of Seele, or worse."

"There's worse than S... them?" Fuyutsuki blinked.

"There is no 'High Man' on the totem pole, as well you know.

>Seele has a position of power because someone or something in a position of power backed them when they originated. Now, quit dithering and hire them."<p>

"What department?"

"Didn't they specify?" asked Gendou.

"Well, Yashiro did mention he wanted to be under the 'Purple Haired Vixen', but I think most men would say that about Misato anyway," Fuyutsuki said wryly.

"That's not a half bad idea. Go ahead and place them under Katsuragi, in Tactical. It's empty anyway."

"What the hell are they going to do in Tactical?"

"Other than a direct application of the wealth of knowledge they possess? Oh, I don't know. Maybe Misato needs a secretary? Or perhaps a Gofer? Or mayhap an aide de camp?"

"I get the point. All right, I'll put them in Tactical. When do they start?"

"As soon as humanly possible. Since they're not human, now would be nice."

"Right. I'll get right on it," Kouzou said before hanging up the phone.

"Congratulations, you're both hired, and will begin as of now," Fuyutsuki said crisply as he reentered the reviewing room. He handed the two jinn their information packets. "Read these, they contain information crucial for your safety, success, and survival as a Nerv-Japan employee. Any questions? Yes, Yashiro?"

"Do we, like, get cool uniforms?" Yashiro asked.

"Yes, you get uniforms. If you open your 'Welcome to Nerv' >booklet to page thirteen, 'Proper Appearance In The Workplace', you will see the basic technician uniform. Yours will be similar in design, save black trousers and a red Duty Jacket."<p>

There was a flipping of pages. Yashiro smiled, "Cooooool. I'm gonna be an Ensign!"

"umh..."

Fuyutsuki sighed, "Yes, Johnson?"

"Do I have to wear the skirt? I prefer pants."

"Yes, you can wear pants. What is it, Yashiro?" Kouzou asked to his raised hand.

"We get guns? Really?"

"Yes. You will receive proper instruction in the use of firearms, and one will be issued to you for on duty use, which you will wear at all times."

"I like guns!" Yashiro said enthusiastically.

Fuyutsuki's right eyebrow ticked. Urge to Destroy.  
>World... Rising... he thought, and he had to relax his jaw muscles before he sighed again and asked, "Yes, Johnson?"<p>

"What are our assigned duties?"

"That decision will belong to your commanding officer."

"Oh, because I can't make coffee worth a damn."

"No, she really can't." Yashiro affirmed.

"I'll keep that in mind."

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> Gendou looked at the two former angels before him, dressed sharply in the red and black uniforms of Nerv Tactical. He had summoned them to his office to personally take stock of them, and had decided to let them stew a bit before speaking. They had been in the room for a little under a minute now, Yashiro was giving his Seperoth surreptitious glances now and again, while Angel was doing her best to seem relaxed and unconcerned with the terribly ominous surroundings.<p>

Finally, Yashiro spoke. "High Commander, Sir, I believe there's something you should know."

Gendou raised an eyebrow. "What would that be, Ensign?"

"Your Tree of Life is incorrect, sir."

Gendou blinked. "Excuse me?"

"Well, it's mostly correct, sir, but there are a few mistranslations and scrambled phrasings, sir."

"And you would know this because?" Gendou asked.

"Begging your pardon, but we're jinn, sir," Yashiro said.

Gendou nodded crisply. To him, such an admission was a relief. "Good to hear, Yashiro-kun. I know you two were Sachiel and Shamshiel," at this, Angel jumped a bit, but Yashiro seemed calm. "I expect you both to offer as much information as you can concerning those yet to come. You don't seem very surprised at this, Yashiro->kun."<p>

"No Sir."

"Why?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I expected it. After all, you did use those planes to write my name upside down in the sky while I was attacking Tokyo Three. Anyone with enough knowledge and chutzpah to do that would almost certainly know our true identities," Yashiro explained.

Gendou nodded, then looked to Angel. "You have been quiet.

>Why?"<p>

"Sir. I'm brash and impulsive, but I know better than to stick my foot where it doesn't belong," she said, then leaned forward slightly, using her hand to block Yashiro's view of her mouth while whispering, "Besides, he's the smart one. Technically, he's my superior in the old hierarchy, so I thought it best to let him take the fore."

"Your superior? Are you comfortable with a subordinate position?"

She nodded. "Yes sir."

"Then I'm promoting you both, Yashiro to First Lieutenant, >Johnson to Second. You will both report only to Captain Katsuragi Misato, Fuyutsuki Kouzou, and Myself. Understood?" He asked while placing a pair of insignia pins on his desk.<p>

They both nodded, and then retrieved their respective pins.

Gendou pressed an intercom button on his desk. "Katsuragi, >you may come in now."<p>

Misato entered the office and looked the two over. "So these are my new toys?" she asked Gendou. Yashiro blinked at that, while Angel smirked.

"Toys, captain?" Gendou said. "They're your responsibility, >yes. Toys, no."<p>

"Besides, he might break," Angel quipped, elbowing Yashiro.

He stoically ignored this.

Misato shared a grin with Angel, deciding she'd get along with her just fine. "I don't know. He might do for an hour, or so."

"Nah, I give him thirty minutes, at best. Maybe with a little practice, an hour, but right off the bat?" Angel said, giving Yashiro a look herself. "I don't think so."

"You never know. I might pull a trick or two out of my hat and surprise you," Yashiro finally commented.

"Oh, I'd like to see that," Angel said.

"You still owe me, you realize. Don't make me take you as a down

payment."

"Hey, I paid you back for the clothes!"

"The other thing, involving a countertop, some cigarettes,  
>and an Angel."<p>

"Oh, that. Right..."

"Sounds kinky," Misato said, before making a shooing motion with her hands. "We can continue this conversation later. Let's not annoy the High Commander any more than we need too." She then turned to Gendou, and offered a formal bow. "Thanks, boss. I really needed the help with the paperwork."

Gendou nodded. "Duly noted, Captain. Dismissed."

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> Fuyutsuki was overseeing the removal of the fourth Angel's S2 core, a process that was going smoothly. He was there as little more than a figurehead, to show the able technicians that higher authority was interested and would be displeased if they screwed up.<br>The techs seemed to realize this just as much as Fuyutsuki did, and were being extra careful.

Idly, Fuyutsuki wondered at the girl he had interviewed this afternoon. Such a beautiful woman to have emerged from this great monstrosity. It was nearly as bizarre as the reason why the Angels were attacking in the first place; which, as near as he could tell,

>was simply due to God's whim.<p>

Sure, others would say there was a reason. The false prophets proclaimed it was heavenly retribution; God's wrath unleashed against a sinful mankind. Some in the know thought it was some type of grand test, to see if we were yet qualified for the next stage of evolution. Gendou, however, had his own ideas.

"It's a fucking game of chess, Fuyutsuki," Gendou had said.

>"Or Mahjong. He's bored, we've screwed up, and now He's toying with us before he decides just what he's going to do with the sinful,<br>disobedient child. He knows our options, and knows the choices we make. He knows Seele's planning on uniting with Lilith. He knows I plan to fuck that up. He's the master, mocking his protege with a diversion while he sets up the real assault. The Angels. The Evangelions, they are just smokescreens, an attempt to hide the true motives of both sides. And His is doing it's job, while ours is probably only blinding the masses."

Fuyutsuki was forced to agree. God was omniscient, after all. But to continue the ruse, did it mean the Holy approved of Gendou's plan? Or did the appearance of the jinn mean he did not?

He was pulled from his musings as one of the techs approached him. "Sub-Commander, sir. We have removed the core intact. There appears to be minimal degradation, and no activity.  
>What do we do with it now, sir?"<p>

"Box it, and ship it to Ireland. Nerv-I is planning to install it in their 'Battle Type' Evangelion, Unit Four," Fuyutsuki told him.

"Yes sir," the tech said before turning back to his crew and issuing instructions.

Fuyutsuki returned to his musings as they boxed up the core,  
>and came to realize something he didn't know.<p>

Just what was Gendou's true plan?

'\-/ ' Neon Genesis Evangelion: Honor's Duty " Stanza Eight: Jagged  
Revelations End

End  
file.